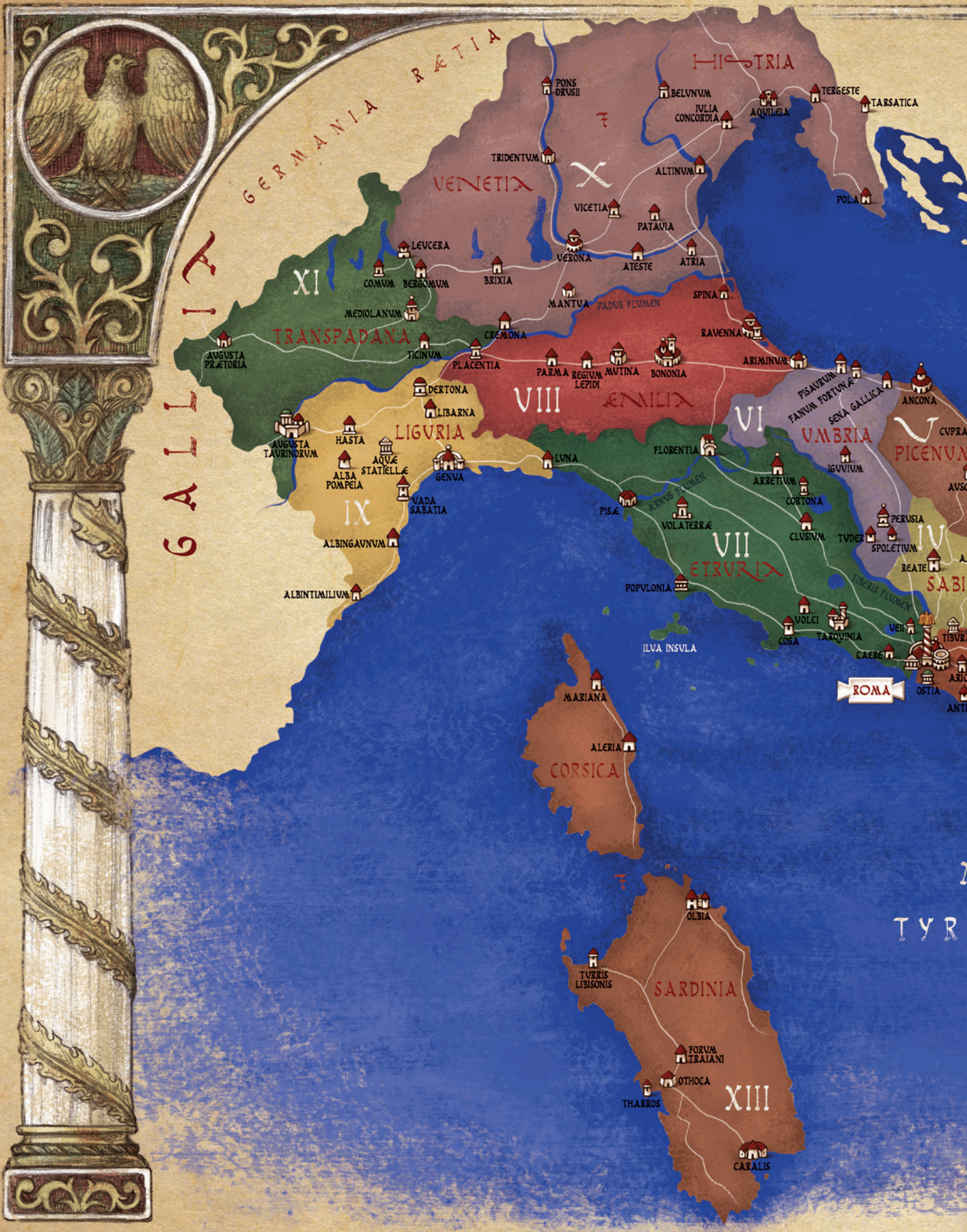
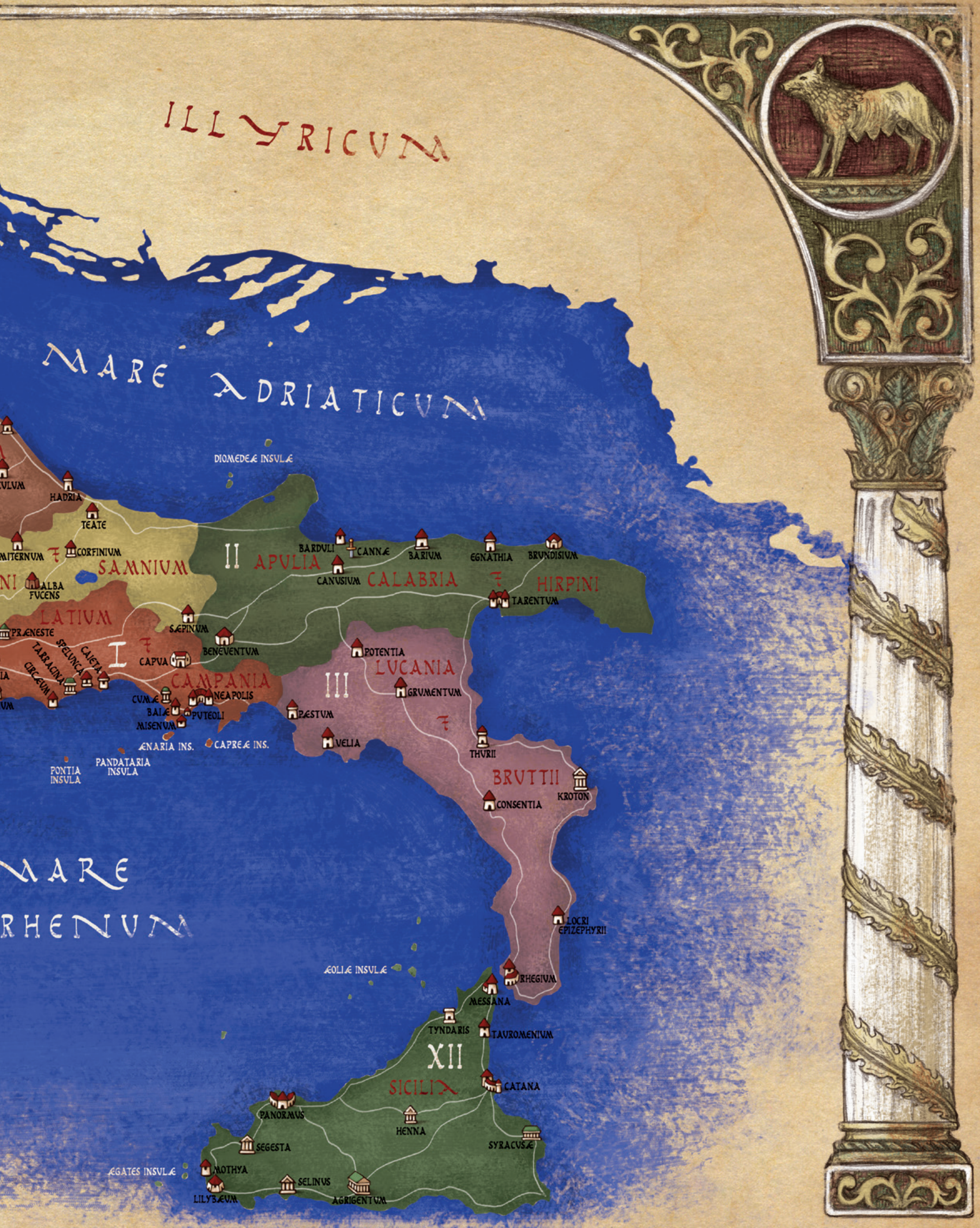
LEX·ARCANA

ITALIA

LAND OF ANCIENT MAGIC AND DARK INTRIGUE


GERMANIA RÆTIA
GALLIA
HISTRIA
PONS DRVSII
BELVNVM
IVLIA CONCORDIA
AQVILEIA
TERGESTE
TARSATICA
TRIDENTVM
VENETIA
X
ALTINVM
POLA
VICETIA
PATAVIA
LEVCERA
VERONA
ATESTE
ATRIA
XI
COMVM
BERGOMVM
BRIXIA
MANTVA
PADVS FLVMEN
SPINA
MEDIOLANVM
TRANSPADANA
CREMONA
RAVENNA
AVGVSTA PRÆTORIA
TICINVM
PLACENTIA
PARMA
REGIVM LEPIDI
MVTINA
BONONIA
ARIMINVM
DERTONA
LIBARNA
VIII
ÆMILIA
PISAVRVM
FANVM FORTVNÆ
SENA GALLICA
ANCONA
VI
VMBRIA
V
CVPRA
PICENV
AVGVSTA TAVRINORVM
HASTA
LIGVRIA
AQVÆ STATIELLÆ
ALBA POMPEIA
GENVA
LVNA
FLORENTIA
IGVVIVM
ARRETIVM
AVSO
CORTONA
VADA SABATIA
IX
PISÆ
ARNVS FLVMEN
VOLATERRÆ
PERVSIA
CLVSIVM
TVDER
SPOLETIVM
IV
ALBINGAVNVM
VII
ETRVRIA
REATE
SABI
POPVLONIA
TIBERIS FLVMEN
ALBINTIMILIVM
VOLCI
TARQVINIA
VEII
TIBVR
COSA
ILVA INSVLA
CAERE
ROMA
OSTIA
ARIC
ANTI
MARIANA
ALERIA
CORSICA
OLBIA
TYR
TVRRIS LIBISONIS
SARDINIA
FORVM TRAIANI
OTHOCA
THARROS
XIII
CARALIS


ILLYRICUM
MARE ADRIATICUM
DIOMEDEÆ INSULÆ
VLVM
HADRIA
TEATE
MITERNVM
CORFINIVM
SAMNIVM
NI
ALBA FVCENS
LATIVM
PRÆNESTE
TARRACINA
SPELVNCA
CAIETA
CIRCÆVM
IA
VM
I
CAPVA
SÆPINVM
BENEVENTVM
CAMPANIA
CVMÆ
NEAPOLIS
BAIÆ
PVTEOLI
MISENVM
ÆNARIA INS.
CAPREÆ INS.
PONTIA INSULA
PANDATARIA INSULA
II
APULIA
BARDULI
CANNÆ
BARIVM
EGNATHIA
BRVNDISIVM
CANVSIVM
CALABRIA
HIRPINI
TARENTVM
III
POTENTIA
LUCANIA
GRVMENTVM
PÆSTVM
VELIA
THVRII
BRVTTII
KROTON
CONSENTIA
MARE
RHENVM
LOCRI EPIZEPHYRII
ÆOLIÆ INSULÆ
RHEGIVM
MESSANA
TYNDARIS
TAVROMENIVM
XII
SICILIA
CATANA
PANORMVS
HENNA
SEGESTA
SYRACVSÆ
ÆGATES INSULÆ
MOTHYA
SELINVS
LILYBÆVM
AGRIGENTVM

LEX·ARCANA

ITALIA

LAND OF ANCIENT MAGIC AND DARK INTRIGUE

ITALIA – LAND OF ANCIENT MAGIC AND DARK INTRIGUE is a volume by
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INTRODUCTION

Italia - Land of Ancient Magic and Dark Intrigue is a geographic module for *Lex Arcana, Second Edition.* This volume is divided into two sections. The first, which includes Parts I, II, and III, can be read by both players and Demiurges. These pages describe the mysterious, political, and magical aspects of Italia, without providing details on game mechanics or elements of mystery that players will be able to discover by playing. Even when a monster or an NPC is mentioned or described, the description provided reflects what could be learned from the rumors of the place, containing many elements of truth, but also some inaccuracies, or even some errors. The precise description, complete with statistics or game rules, is provided in the second section (Parts IV and V), which is reserved for Demiurges. The last part (Part VI) is also reserved for the Demiurges and contains three adventures set in the province.

CLASSIFIED REPORTS AND SECRET MESSAGES

The first section is made up of three highly-classified documents. directly from the secret Imperial archives. Each of these texts describes the province of Italia through the words of, and from the point of view of, three very different characters of the *Lex Arcana* world.

Part I. Relatio de Provincia Italia (Report on the Province of Italia) is a two-part scroll written in the terse style of a trained magistrate, prepared by the outgoing provincial governor for a colleague about to take his place, in order to inform him of the multifaceted nature of such a key province of the Empire. The first part, *Notitiae Universales* (General Information), provides a geographical description of the land and briefly touches on its history, with some mythical elements. The second part, *Descriptio XIII Regionum* (Description of the XIII Regions), focuses on the thirteen regions of the province, providing a comprehensive description of their main roads and a deeper coverage of their towns and people. It lists the main Italic settlements, along with any dangers one may find there, and a series of sidebars provides additional information of the unusual and arcane, key characters (presented as NPCs), monsters or supernatural creatures, extraordinary local traditions, encounter tables, and historical facts.

Part II. Arcana Saturniae Telluris (The Secrets of the Saturnia Tellus) is an elegant scroll written in the inspired style of a priest. The author is the Magister of the Augurs, informing the new governor of the mysteries and magical lore of this province, a most ancient land upon which came and battled numerous peoples and their deities. Although Roman rule has been stable for centuries, Italic traditions before Rome's advent have such deep roots that many have survived, though hiding under a surface of compliance. The text is divided by its magical and supernatural contents, providing information on the ancient gods of Latius and their archaic rule and rites of worship that, though mostly forgotten, are important to be familiar with. Then follows a necessary essay on the hostile gods, cruel powers worshiped by the people Rome defeated, who have sworn eternal hatred. A chapter is dedicated to the magical land of Campania, where lives the most famous prophetess of ancient Italia, the Sibylla Cumana, a place which is also believed to be home to an access to the Underworld. A long section is dedicated to the main shrines of Italia, seats of ancient cults and powerful oracles, scattered all over the province and still attended by the faithful. Another chapter provides details on the goddesses who ruled the lands of Italia before Rome, never forgotten by their children and followers. Because the history of not just Rome, but also that many other Italic people. is tied to the spirit of the wolf, a chapter is dedicated to this symbolic animal. Lastly, two chapters are dedicated to Italic magic. One describes the places where magic or creatures typical of the *Italian* lands can be found, while the other is completely dedicated to Etruscan magic, perhaps the most powerful and mysterious of the province.

Part III. Compendium Secretorum Italicorum (Short Report on Italic Secrets) is hastily scrawled on numerous battered scraps of papyrus, kept together with a cord and covered in dark stains. Maybe it's blood, or maybe simply wine. Who knows! The text is addressed to the governor from an unknown agens in rebus, an undercover secret agent who has roamed Italia for months investigating her political and social dangers, plots, secret societies, crime syndicates, and the like. In this section, the arcane is less prominent, though not entirely absent, for some secret societies, as political as their goals may be, have access to supernatural means, while others have connections with Imperial politics, dark secrets of state that should not be unveiled.

IN THE HEART OF THE ITALIC ARCANA

The second section is dedicated to the Demiurge.

Part IV covers new rituals of Italic magic intimately tied to the history, and the very essence, of this ancient land. The scholars of the Cohors Arcana can then add to their knowledge these new Divination rituals, born of the water the province is so rich in, or learn how to harness the power of its most ancient deities for accurate oracles. A new, tremendous power related to lightning will also be revealed. The ancestral deities who watched over Rome in her hard infancy grant new Indigitamenta to those capable of invoking their forgotten names anew, and the ancient Italic populations provide new pieces of equipment and weapons, including powerful magical items such as a group of Etruscan artifacts believed to have been lost.

Part V presents a wealth of Italic monsters, such as supernatural creatures, animals, and other beings from the many different regions of the province, including a group of Etruscan deities and demons. Lastly, in this section are listed the numerous NPCs mentioned in the first three parts of the volume.

Part VI, lastly, includes three adventures. The first, *The Cave of the Sibylla*, is set in Cuma, magical heart of Campania. The second, *Bolts out of the Blue*, will take the Custodes through the perennial snows of the Alps on the borders between Italia and Gallia. The third, *The Black Wings of Vengeance*, is set in Etruria, the region with the strongest ties to the supernatural. The three adventures are independent from one another, though sharing a strong investigative component, for unraveling the mysteries of Italia requires much acumen, as supernatural presences often blend with dark political machinations.

Do not be fooled into believing this volume exposes every spell and dark plot of this province. This is Italia, o adventurers, realm of ancient gods, cradle of Rome, the most sacred land in the Empire. She shall not yield her secrets easily. You will have to earn them. Onward, then, to adventure!

RÆTIA
GERMANIA
VENETIA
ISTRIA
X
XI
TRANSPADANA
ILLYRICUM
VIII
LIGURIA
IX
GALLIA
MARE
ADRIATICUM
VII
ETRURIA
SAMNIUM
II
APULIA
CALABRIA
III
LUCANIA
CORSICA
SARDINIA

PART I

RELATIO DE PROVINCIA ITALIA

GENERAL INFORMATION

Salve, magna parens frugum, Saturnia Tellus, magna virum.

Hail, Saturnian land, great mother of crops and men.

(Vergilius, *Georgica*, Book II, 173)

FROM THE REPORT OF THE OUTGOING GOVERNOR OF THE PROVINCE OF ITALIA TO HIS SUCCESSOR

ANNO AB URBE CONDITA MCCXXXI.

QUINTUS VALERIUS MESSALLA
INLUSTRI VIRO GAIO LAMPRIDIO VALENTINIANO
SALUTEM DICIT.

Dear friend, allow me to extend my most heartfelt congratulations on your appointment to the high office our beloved Emperor Theodomirus has bestowed upon you. In this report of mine, I shall endeavor to provide as much detail as possible on how the Province of Italia, of which I was the unworthy Governor before you, is faring.

As you, like me, are of Italic origin, much will either seem superfluous or be already known to you, however I prefer to err on the side of caution and precision, rather than presenting you an incomplete picture of what I was responsible for during my time.

Italia is the heart of the Empire, and I wish for your work in managing such a symbolic region to be made as comfortable as possible, which is the reason behind this clear and thorough report.

GEOGRAPHIC POSITION

Italia, from the Alps southward to the sea, has its southern most reach in the city of Rhegium, in the lands of the Bruttii. Its shape resembles that of an oak leaf, much longer than it is wide, and with a great many gulfs and inlets, with a total length of 1020 miles from Augusta Praetoria to Rhegium. Its width at the center, measured at Rome, is 136 miles. The total length of the coast amounts to 2049 miles.

THE MAIN MOUNTAINS

Italia has two main mountain chains. The Alps stretch 1000 miles in length from the Tyrrhenum to the Adriaticum, their width varying greatly depending upon where it is measured. Where they separate Italia from Germania, they measure more than 100 miles wide, while for the remaining part, as if following a providential design of nature, they do not exceed 70.

The Apennine Mountains form the largest mountain system in Italia, ranging without interruption from the Alps to the channel of Sicilia. Their length, as such, is equal to that of the whole *Italian* Peninsula.

THE NUMEROUS RIVERS

This land is blessed with numerous rivers, but only one is held sacred as a divinity, the fateful Tiberis, from which our people set out to conquer the world. In ancient times, it was called Thybris, and even before that Albula. It flows from roughly midway through the Apennines, in the land of Arretium. It is small and not navigable at first, if its waters are not regulated with a network of dams. Later on, in the lands of the Umbri and the Sabini, it can be sailed with barges and rafts. Around Rome, it is fully navigable by vessels of any size from the Italic seas, becoming a trade artery for the wares of the whole world. It often swells and overflows, although its floods are mostly cause for reverent awe, rather than actual terror.

The other important *Italian* river is the Padus, giving its name to the fertile plains it crosses, the Padan Plain. It flows from mighty springs from the depths of Vesulus, an alpine peak among the tallest in the lands of the Liguri. In addition to the 300 miles that separate the springs from the mouth, its sinuous flow adds 88 more.

The Padus receives water not only from other rivers along its path, but also from immense lakes, feeding a grand total of 30 rivers into the Adriaticum. The most famous among them are the Tanarus, Trebia, Tarus, Rhenus, the two Durx, Ticinus, Addua, Oius, Lambrus, and Mincius. The waters of the Padus are plentiful, and its strength fades only at the mouth. Therefore, its passage, though regulated with canals and bends for 120 miles between Ravenna and Altinus, is harmful for the surrounding lands. The Padus is the father of all Italic rivers in size, and is also linked to many ancient legends, many of them trying to explain its heavy fogs (see page 14).

To the south of the Padus, I must mention the Rubicon, flowing into the Mare Adriaticum. Although small, it was the scene of a great event, the Divine Julius Caesar's return to Italia after his victorious campaigns against the Gauls. Right on its banks, Caesar pronounced his fateful sentence *alea iacta est*, "The die is cast." Was it a symbolic gesture, or was it some sort of divination practice? The answer is lost to the past, although someone is believed to hold the truth (see page 109).

Further down south, on the other coast of Italia, I must mention the Etruscan Arnus. It has lost much of its importance, but in ancient times it was one of the sacred borders of the Etruscan land and is still worshiped by nostalgics (see page 122).

CROWNED BY THE SEAS

Italia is crowned by the seas surrounding her. They are named after the people who lived on their coasts.

The Mare Tyrrhenum to the west is also called Ligure in its northern most waters, Etruscan at its center and to the south, and past Sicilia and coming back north is named Ausonius. Some call the part from the island of Sardinia to the ocean the Sardinian Sea, although it was the Etruscans who left the largest impression on this area, as the very name Tyrrhenum derives from the ancient name of this people, the Tyrsenoi or Tyrreni.

The eastern sea is called Hadriaticum from the city of Hadria, now Atria, earning it the alternative name of Atriaticum or Adriaticum. These waters yield much fish, but it also seems they are inhabited by monstrous or magical creatures that sometimes harass careless sailors. This is what sailors who have braved the open seas for generations say, and I would not dare call them liars.

HISTORICAL NOTES

In the mythical times when ancient gods walked the earth, Italia was empty of people. On its expanse ruled alone the god Saturn, lord of the fertile land, which is why the great poet Vergilius called Italia *Saturnia Tellus*, Saturnian land, in his verses.

THE FIRST PEOPLES

As it was not proper for such a magnificent land to remain empty, Saturn had a first people settle in, consigned to history with the name of Aborigines.

It is unclear where they came from, but the scholar Dyonisius of Halicarnassus believed they were nomads, and that their name came from the verb *aberrare*, "to wander". Others instead claimed they were born of the very earth, and that they inhabited it *ab origine*, "since the beginning" of time, as reflected by their name. Others, like the Greek poet Hesiod, believed the Aborigines to be descendants of the Ligures, one of the first three peoples of human kind: the Ligures to the west, the Scythians to the east, and the Ethiopians in Africa.

Whatever their origin, the Aborigines grew sincerely fond of their new land. Their most illustrious king, Latinus, was said to be the son of the goddess Marìca by Faunus, the most ancient Italic gods (for more information on these deities, see page 70). In recognition of such a sacred bond, the Aborigines changed their name to Latini and named Latium the region in which would later rise Rome.

As the son of two divine beings, King Latinus was a powerful seer. As soon as Aeneas made his way to Latium, fleeing from the fall of Troy, Latinus realized that this prince would sire the people who would rule over an empire without end. So, he gave Aeneas the hand of his daughter Lavinia, although she was already promised to a local prince, Turnus, lord of the Rutuli. Latinus' breaking of his word led to war, but the combined forces of the Latini and Trojans prevailed. The two allies merged into one people, with a great many happy weddings, and sixteen generations later were born the fateful twins Romulus and Remus, and the history of Rome began.

In these mythical times came from the east into the land of Saturn the mysterious Pelasgians. Some say they hailed from the Isle of Lemnos in Asia, where, according to Homer, fell the god Vulcan. Helped by its inhabitants, the god thanked them by teaching them the secrets of metallurgy, an art in which the Pelasgians have always excelled.

Some identify the Pelasgians with the Peleset warriors or the People of the Sea, who thousands of years ago conquered the lands of the Egyptian pharaohs.

The Pelasgians, also called Thyrsenoi or Tyrrhenoi, settled on the Tyrrhenian coast, named after them, but the monicker with which these people are better known today is Etruscans. Although assimilated into the great Roman people, traces of their ancient power and wisdom are still recognizable in our culture. But on this topic, others are more knowledgeable than I (see page 122).

The Pelasgians were phenomenal builders, raising fortified citadels and colossal walls of polygonal stones, still to this day called "Pelasgian walls". To the south, they reached Campania, founding numerous noble cities, rich Capua among them. Northwards, they delved beyond the Apennine Mountains, entered the Celtic lands of the Padan Plain, and founded numerous cities. One of them, Spina, rose right at the mouth of the Padus, overlooking the other sea that surrounds the peninsula.

THE PEOPLES OF THE PADUS

Now that I have mentioned it, I should describe the Padan Plain, the origin of so much of the peninsula's sustenance. The plain is named after the great river that crosses it and makes it fertile.

In ancient times, the Padus region belonged to the great Celtic area ranging from the misty lands of Britannia to the inner highlands of Asia. So wide was this area that the Celts living there had different names, according to the region they lived in: Britanni in Britannia, Celtiberi in Ispania, Pannoni in Pannonia, Galati in the inner Asia, and Gauls in Gallia and on the Padan Plain.

The Padus area, called Gallia Cisalpina, has been inhabited for a long time by bellicose tribes, of whom we remember the Sènones most of all, who dared strike at Rome, even laying siege to the Capitoline Hill. Only the geese sacred to Juno Moneta, raising the alarm, prevented the most important hill in the Urbs from being captured.

Divine Julius Caesar definitively vanquished the Gauls, bringing the Pax Romana to Gallia Cisalpina and the Gallic northern regions beyond the Alps. The Padan Plain was then conquered and divided into a grid of fields, roads, and cities. Since then, it has been one of the wealthiest, most beautiful, and most civilized regions in Italia, although it still keeps its fair share of ancient mysteries.

The course of the Padus is often plagued by mists, from which many have heard mysterious moans and whispers, and folklore has explained this, drawing from most ancient tales. When it was still called Eridanus, the river saw a tragic and supernatural event. Phaethon, the youngest son of Apollo, stole the flaming chariot his father used to carry the sun across the sky, wishing to prove he could perform the same task as his august parent. However, the chariot proved too difficult to dominate, pulled as it was by four magical horses. He could not rein them in, and, after wildly spreading fires and drought over much of the earth, the chariot was struck down by a lightning bolt of Jupiter's, crashing into the Eridanus. Phaethon died and was mourned for a long time by his sisters, kneeling on the fateful banks of the river. Jupiter then turned them into poplar trees, to ease their sorrow. So, it is believed that the wreckage of the chariot, still hot although underwater, causes clouds of vapor, while the moans of Phaethon's sisters can still be heard today. It is said that these trees exude amber tears with supernatural properties (see page 43).

CENTRAL ITALIA

The central part of the peninsula, especially on the Tyrrenian side, is the cradle of Rome, although, of course, our people were not the only ones to inhabit these lands. Much was occupied, as said earlier, by the Etruscans. On their borders settled the Piceni to the north, the Umbri right in the heart of Italia, and the Aequi and the Volsci in close proximity to Rome. The warlike Samnites ruled over much of the Apennine Mountains, and from them came numerous other peoples, such as the Marsi, the Osci, the Hirpini, and the Lucani. Many of them are deeply connected to magical traditions, about which I advise you to consult the work of wiser scholars than I on the topic (see page 67).

BETWEEN ITALIA AND GRAECIA

The southern part of the peninsula has been Greek land for a long time, even called Magna Graecia (Greater Graecia) by its inhabitants, aware of the beauty of their land, the prosperity of its fields, and the virtue of its people. The heart of these lands, however, remained for a long time in the hands of the peoples who had inhabited it since the dawn of time and who left a legacy that endures still to this day. The most famous were the Oenotrians, who then took the name of their most beloved king, Italus. It was then called Italia, the area where they lived, the tip of the peninsula that leans into Sicilia. As centuries passed, the named climbed back, so to speak, up the peninsula to indicate all the lands from Rhegium up to the course of the Padus.

Campania was originally inhabited by the Ausones, named after their progenitor Ausonius, son of cunning Ulysses and of the nymph Calypso. He led that land to prosperity, earning it the blessing of the gods and the epithet of *felix*, lucky.

In addition to good fortune, it is permeated with magic. It should suffice to say that the most famous prophetess of Apollo, the Cumaean Sibylla, has lived here for centuries, and here is located what is believed to be one of the entrances to Hades, the Lacus Avernus (see page 82). The waters of this region were also inhabited for a long time by sirens.

In Apulia lived in ancient times the Iapyges. Although bordering with the Greek colonies of the Tarentum gulf, they were not related to the people of Magna Graecia, and instead were said to be closer to the Illyri on the other side of the Adriaticum. According to the legends, the Iapyges had an illustrious origin, as they claimed to be the descendants of Iapyx, the lesser-known son of the great inventor Daedalus. We all remember Icarus, who died too young to have descendants, but Iapyx lived long and was dearly loved by the god Apollo, who granted him great powers, such as prophecy, skill with the lyre, and healing. It was Iapyx, as recounted by Vergilius, who healed wounded Aeneas as he escaped from the destruction of Troy. From the Iapyges split then two more tribes, the Daunii, who settled north in Apulia, and the Peucetii, who went south.

THE GREAT ISLANDS

Fertile Sicilia was settled by the Greeks, too, even though the island is not part of Magna Graecia proper. At the beginning of time, it was inhabited by two supernatural species of giants: the Cyclopes and the Laestrygonians. While the latter soon left for Sardinia, the Cyclopes, giants with one eye, gathered where now stands the fiery mountain called Aetna and, although eaters of human flesh, were spared by the gods because of their legendary skill as smiths. In fact, among the flames of Mount Aetna they forged Jupiter's lightning bolts, the suit of armor of Minerva, the chariot of Apollo, and weapons and items of numerous other deities.

When the first tribes of men settled the isle, the gods imprisoned most the Cyclopes beneath Aetna and confined others in the remote isles of the Sicilian Sea. It was on one of these isles that Ulysses met Polyphemos and was kept prisoner alongside his companions. The Laestrygonians, instead, were relegated to the most remote reaches of Corsica.

In spite of their captivity, however, the Cyclopes seemed to find a way to move freely and in secret. The great poet Vergilius wrote that between Aetna and the Sicilian and Greek isles spans a great network of underground caves that grant the Cyclopes great freedom of movement. Others have even claimed that these monstrous giants have gathered into an alliance spanning the entirety of the Mare Nostrum that has been plotting for thousands of years against our gods, throwing their lot with whatever foreign peoples or deities would further their plans (see page 61). Such scheming could be behind numerous otherwise-inexplicable supernatural events all over the Empire.

Once rid of the Cyclopes, western Sicilia was settled by the Elimi, perhaps related to the Ligures, by the mysterious Sicani in the central reaches, and by the Siculi to the southeast, descendants of the Trojans fleeing the destruction of their city.

Into the western most tip came the Phoenicians, expert traders and sailors, as well as ferocious warriors from far-away Syria. They came looking for new lands to conquer and new markets for their wares, expanding to the more fertile coasts of the Mare Nostrum, hated Carthago being one of their most illustrious cities. It is said Rome and Carthago were born in the same fateful moment and had a parallel history; as Rome expanded in the Italic Peninsula, the Carthaginians conquered the sea. Inevitably the two powers came to blows when Carthago had the gall to contest Rome's lordship over the Italic coasts, and it was only after much blood had been shed that Rome prevailed over such a powerful enemy and its spiteful gods. And so not only was Carthago brought low, but the rest of the Phoenician tribes in the Mare Nostrum, too. Phoenician dominion, however, proved too deeply rooted to be simply wiped out without consequences, and to this day Phoenician influence still hangs malignant in Sicilia, ready to resurface.

The other great island of the Mare Nostrum, Sardinia, was inhabited by dangerous and magical creatures in ancient times. As I said, numerous sources place here the other species of man-eating giants, the Laestrygonians, gifted with two eyes, but not any less monstrous than the Cyclopes. Mythical Ulysses encountered them in an episode fraught with misfortune, when they destroyed his fleet and devoured all his sailors after impaling them on enormous skewers. Only Ulysses' own ship escaped to tell the tale.

The Laestrygonians probably have suffered the same fate as the Cyclopes, disappearing from this land before their place was taken by the human dynasties. In Sardinia, the Phoenicians had lived for a long time before the arrival of the Carthaginians, not any less bloodthirsty than the giants, if those who claim they sacrificed children are to be believed. The legend seems to have at least a modicum of legitimacy, because numerous Phoenician settlements in both islands feature special cemeteries called "tophet", where are buried only the infants sacrificed to their aberrant gods. What we know for sure, anyway, is that there exists a network of followers of such officially extinct cults, and similar graveyards and peculiar stone buildings with underground structures are found all along the coasts of the Mare Nostrum, where once ruled the Phoenicians.

Equally disturbing are the traces left by the people who came before them, of whom we know nothing certain, save for the practice of their warriors of decapitating their enemies and placing their heads on spikes to show their martial prowess, a tradition that seems to have been replaced by banners bearing blindfolded human heads. In addition to the human dangers, however, there are also a great many of arcane in nature.

Everywhere on the isle are enigmatic buildings made of enormous boulders (see page 154). Some say they are the homes of local nymphs unknown in other lands; others believe them to be temples dedicated to deities of the underground waters, while there are those who say they are towers made by the giants. The only hard fact we have is that the Phoenicians, known for their great courage, stayed well away from them and wore amulets with glyphs of protection if they had to pass by any of those structures. Not even the Etruscans, skilled interpreters of magical omens, could understand the nature of these buildings when they took the coasts from their Phoenician lords.

Corsica is such a beautiful land that the Greeks, as soon as they discovered it in their travels, called it *Kalliste*, "the most beautiful", although such beauty hides many dangers. Its inhabitants are famous pirates, and in ancient times provided ferocious mercenaries to the Carthaginians. Here are colossal stone buildings similar to those in Sardinia, evidence of the presence of these ancient peoples and their old gods. Some claim the Laestrygonians took refuge here when the gods exiled them and the Cyclops to make room for humans.

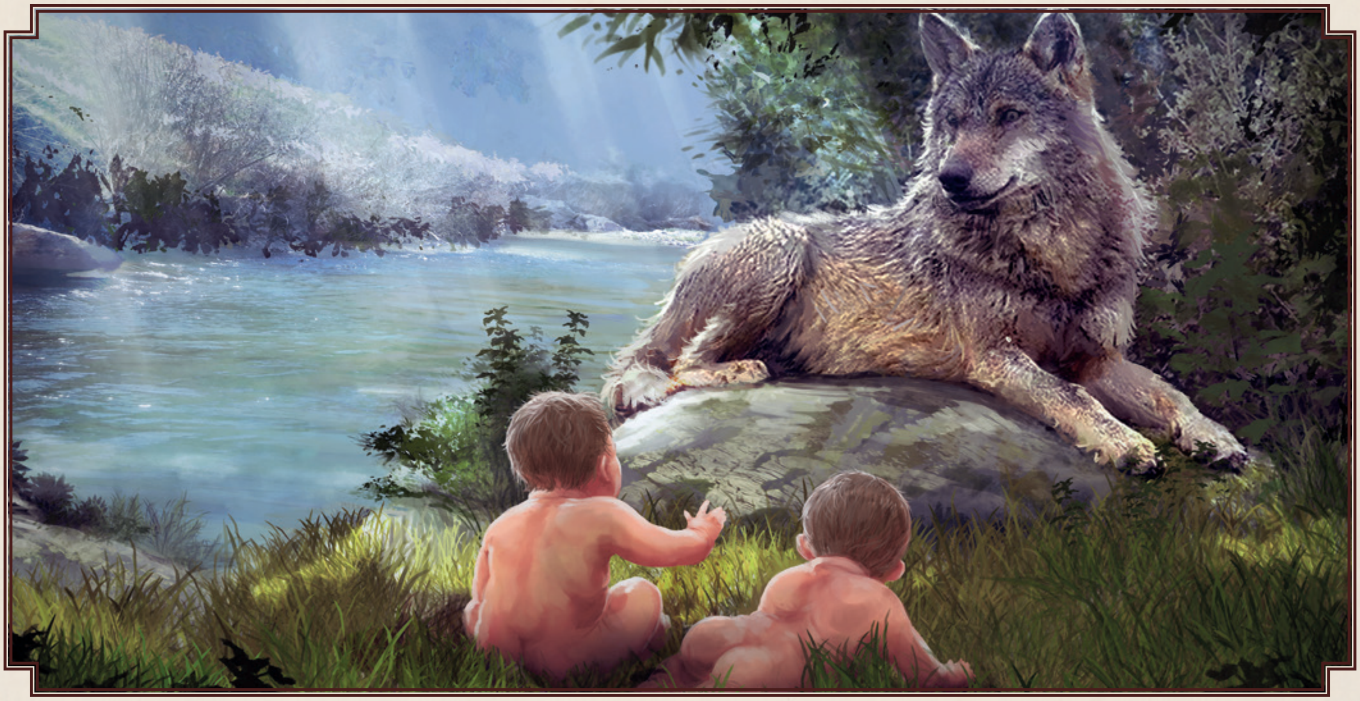
THE RISE OF ROME

I cannot end this section without mentioning the role played by Rome in Italic history. As everybody knows, the Urbs was founded by the twins Romulus and Remus, sons of the god Mars and the Vestal Rea Silvia. In the beginning, the small town had to defend itself from bellicose neighbors and prospered under its seven kings. After Romulus, Numa Pompilius, Tullius Hostilius, Ancus Marcius, Tarquinius Priscus, Servius Tullius, and Tarquinius Superbus took over the leadership of the people. The last three were of Etruscan origin, possibly the reason why so many of the Roman customs and traditions, especially surrounding the art of divination, have an Etruscan origin.

Under the monarchy, we consolidated our power, and then in the age of the Republic, Rome expanded into its neighboring regions. First, we offered friendship and alliance to the Sabini and Latini, but were forced to conquer their lands and impose an armed peace after receiving only hostility in response. Our advance was brutally halted by the invasion of the Gauls, who conquered the Urbs for a spell as brief as it was painful. We rid ourselves of the foreign invaders and subjugated all the Latin tribes, conquering the ancient lands of the Tyrrhenians and the Etruscans, which brought us great magical knowledge, and pushed northwards to the Celts of the Padus. We then defeated the Samnites and their great warriors in three wars, one after the other, and headed south.

Not only did we defeat the peoples of Magna Graecia, but also the invading Pyrrhus, the King of Epirus, who had marched on Italia from Graecia, believing in a brief and successful campaign. We ventured into Sicilia and took it from ancient Carthaginians, a people well versed in the arts of war. The beautiful island was also our first colony outside Italia, earning us the wisdom of its philosophers and of the great inventor Archimedes.

We were still fighting against the Celts around the Padus when Hannibal, the greatest Carthaginian commander of all time, descended and brought war to our borders. After three grueling and devastating wars, the price of peace was brutal, as most of the fighting happened on Italic soil. And so, we set out without fear to rebuild what had been lost. With the Carthaginians defeated, the Mare Nostrum opened to us as the gates of a golden palace, so cross it we did, and conquered an Empire without end.



THE PROVINCE OF ITALIA

The province of Italia occupies the entire extent of the Italic Peninsula. Its natural borders are the Alps to the north and the sea separating it from Graecia to the south, including all the islands. As you well know already, after the recent Lex Integratoria, to the usual list of eleven regions willed by the Divine Augustus in his great wisdom were added the former colonies of Sicilia, Sardinia, and Corsica, which in origin were two separate provinces.

Italia is then presently divided into thirteen *regiones*, from I to XIII, following Augustus' original plan. In centuries past, it is true that the administrative structure of the various lands had been altered from what the great Augustus has established, however recently our Emperor Theodomirus saw it fitting to return to the original method, as it follows the physical characteristics of the territories and the distribution of their original peoples better.

THE CITIES: POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

The numerous cities dotting this land all enjoy the same political and judicial status, their inhabitants being Roman citizens with the right to vote, as per the Constitutio Antoniniana Emperor Caracalla introduced in 965 AUC.

Their political organs tend to mimic the basic structure of Rome itself, and every community has at least the following three: the people's assembly, the governing magistrates, and a council or senate.

All male free citizens can attend the assembly and are divided among voting units, usually called Curiae or Tribus. For most cities, to be eligible one must have a census of at least 100,000 sestertii. Liberti, although their children are not subject to this rule, convicts, and those who exercise shameful crafts are forbidden from taking office.

To access the higher echelons of the hierarchy, one must have served in all the ones below, although it is allowed to hold a position multiple times.

The magistrates are divided into four colleges, helped by a town "senate":

- **Duoviri.** This is the highest rank, always elected in pairs, like Rome's consuls. They call and oversee the assembly and administer the town for a year. Every five years, the acting duoviri are called "quinquennales" and perform the tasks of the censores in Rome, cataloging the citizens and their possessions, and revising the records of the decuriones (see below) to remove those who do not meet the requirements anymore and add any new ones.
- **Aediles.** There are usually two, as in Rome, tasked with maintaining the roads, public buildings, and temples, and supervising the markets, water supplies, and the organization of the *ludi* (the games).
- **Quaestores.** There are two or more, depending on the size of the town, responsible for administering finances.
- **Ordo Decurionum.** This is the town council, similar to the Senate of Rome. The amount of decuriones is fixed, usually at 100, and any who have held public office in the previous five years are automatically added. Among them must be included the so-called *praetextati*, the noble sons still too young to hold an office. This traditional Italic habit makes it so there are children barely a few years old among the decuriones, and is discouraged in any way possible.

Where there are no cities, and there still are lowly-populated or semi-savage areas, civilization tends to cluster around:

- **Vici.** Farming settlements;
- **Castella and oppida.** Fortified places;
- **Pagi.** Rural districts;
- **Canabae.** Small settlements risen where had sojourned legions or trading posts.

CULTS AND RELIGIONS

With so many peoples, it is only natural that in Italia are worshiped a great many deities, their cults recognized, or at least tolerated, by the Empire as long as they respect the domain of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, under whose mighty lightning bolts fall the enemies of Rome. Many of these gods were venerated by the people who lived in the peninsula before Roman conquest, and today are worshiped alongside the official cults.

In the south, understandably, the Greek deities, who for many reasons can be likened to some of our own, are more present. So, it is not unusual that the inhabitants of Agrigentum turn to Zeus or Aphrodite rather than Jupiter or Venus; they are the same entities, after all.

Very different is the situation in the former Phoenicians lands, such as western Sicilia and Sardinia. Here persists the clandestine worship of the terrible Phoenician deities, among whom Baal-Moloch stands out for cruelty, and we know for sure some of his followers have become particularly active in the cities of Lilybaeum, Mothya, and Panormus. We also believe the cult of the goddess Tanit is widespread there, a deity some identify with Venus, Isis, or Astarte; unlike other provinces with shrines dedicated to her, none has ever seen them in Italia, but the great many symbols that could be traced to her carved on buildings, and even on the ruins in Sicilia, seem to hint at the presence of her cult.

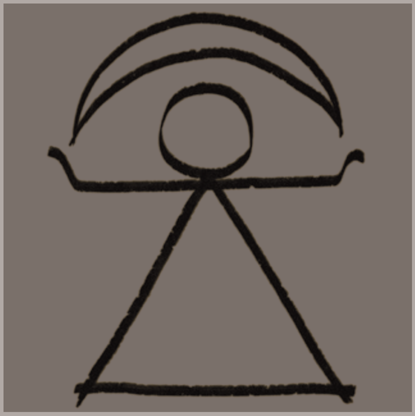
In Sardinia, things are more dire. We do not even know the names of the ancient gods living there before the time of the Carthaginians. The only sure thing is that grass does not grow, and shepherds do not let their herds graze around the mysterious circular towers those ancient peoples built. At night, also, odd war chants sound among sudden and unnatural flashes, and old farmers still keep ancient statuettes of a deity now simply known as "Sardus Pater", a cult so old that today it is next to impossible to learn anything about it.

Widespread in the south is the cult of Cybele, the Great Mother, to whom are dedicated numerous shrines and even a magnificent temple in Rome.
The more esoteric cults have numerous followers, especially the Eleusinian Mysteries, the cult of Egyptian Isis, and that of the mysterious Cabeiri. Of them, I cannot speak, for I am an initiate and forbidden from speaking of their rites. However, those practices are widespread in Rome, too, and you surely know something about them yourself.

In the middle of the province are still worshiped Etruscan gods, somewhat mirrored by our own. Tinia is similar to our Jupiter, Turms to Mercury, Turan to Venus, Aplu to Apollo (even in his very name), Menerva to our Minerva, Artumes to Artemis, et cetera. However, Etruscan religion was in the past much more than this; numerous otherworldly deities coexisted with demons of the hellish regions, winged nymphs, and gods of the Underworld, of whom we barely know anything, but whose supernatural presence is still felt in the ancient land of Etruria. Of this, however, you should ask our Augurs for more detailed and trustworthy insight, and it is to them I address you (see page 67).

TANIT, THE CELESTIAL GODDESS

Tanit was the goddess dearest to the Carthaginians, the Queen of the Heavens, Mother of the Cosmos. Her domains were fertility and the night, mistress of the moon, and bearer of capricious fortune. She also presided over war, like the Phoenician Astarte. Carthaginian ships brought her worship all over the Mare Nostrum, and the Greeks assimilated her into Aphrodite, Artemis, and Demeter. As unusual as it may seem, her cult made its way even into the Urbs. Roman priests likened her to Juno, the Queen of the Heavens, and so in our lands she is commonly called Juno Caelestis, or simply Caelestis.
She seems a benevolent goddess, a motherly friend to human kind, so it becomes hard to explain the presence of the *tophet* and their hundreds of dead infants wherever her worship is strong. Scholars do not agree on these burials. Some believe they are graveyards dedicated to children who died prematurely, trusting them to the benevolent protection of the mother goddess. Others, however, claim the children buried in the *tophet* were sacrificed to her in horrid rites.
Her symbol, a stylized human figure below a crescent moon, appears mostly where Carthaginians had influence, although it still is cause for concern, as it evokes cruel sacrificial practices. The sites where these symbols are found are always under discreet surveillance from the College of Pontiffs.



GOD OF ANCIENT WARRIORS

The entire island of Sardinia is dotted with the ruins of an ancient warrior people who left copious quantities of fortified towers the size of giants. Alongside these ruins are often found icons of an unknown deity, portrayed as a hunter or warrior, his head crowned in feathers and a javelin in his hand. Today only a few of the elders of the island offer occasional devotions to this god, the one they simply call *Sardus Pater*, "the Sardinian Father". The Pontifices, worried as always about keeping the Pax Deorum even with the lesser deities, recommend always behaving as if in the presence of a powerful god when finding a statuette or a small altar among the rocks.

Northern Italia is mostly of Gallic origin, and some villages still worship barbarian deities, causing the occasional public order issue every now and then.

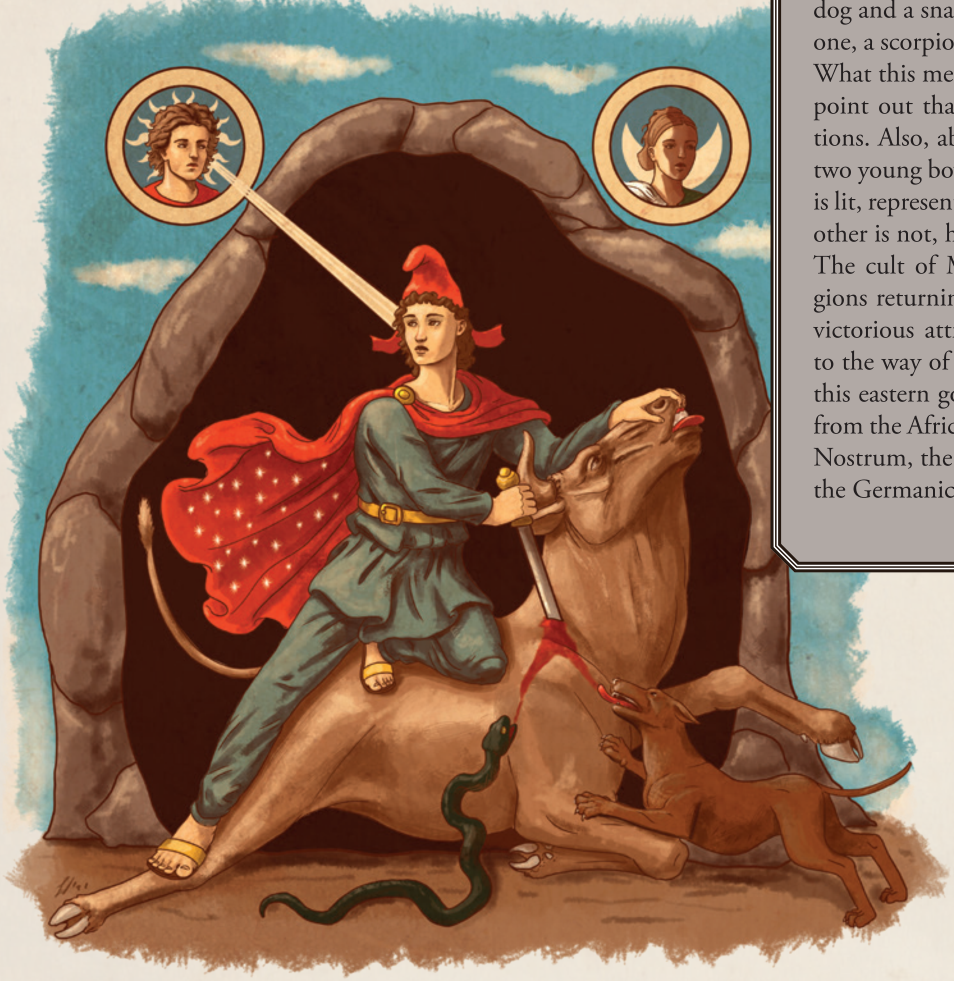
The Judaic Christian sect has spread all over Italia, too. Its main centers of influence are Rome (where lives its spiritual leader, the Pope), Ravenna, with its numerous places of worship and their mosaics, Aquileia, and Mediolanum. The Jews themselves have a presence in Italia, mostly in Rome. Both communities are closed and hostile against any other cultures, and yet are very different one from the other. Christians preach simplicity and renounce earthly pleasures, condemning the luxury of the Empire. Jews, on the other hand, are proud and warlike, and have ancient and mysterious lore.

All over the province is also worshiped Mithra, a deity much loved by the soldiery, and as such very present in frontier settlements, colonies, and anywhere troops gather.

MITHRA, PATRON OF SOLDIERS

Mithra is a benevolent sun god, hailing from ancient Persia. He fights evil spirits and brings sunlight wherever he goes, so he is also considered the guardian of vegetation. Given his solar traits, his followers celebrate his birth during the winter solstice. He also is the judge of the souls of the dead, and his sphere of influence extends to the afterlife, too. Unfortunately, it is difficult to learn more than this, as information about this cult is strictly reserved to his initiates. The god is always represented as a young man with a soldier's cloak and a Phrygian cap, killing a bull with a long dagger. The scene can be interpreted as a sacrifice of fertility, as the blood of the Cosmic Bull flows from the heavens to the earth to make it fertile. However, alongside this main representation the cult presents some rather unusual elements. While Mithra kills the bull, two animals, a dog and a snake, come to drink its blood, while a third one, a scorpion, clamps its pincers on the bull's gonads. What this means is currently unknown, but our priests point out that those animals correspond to constellations. Also, above the main image, often are portrayed two young boys each bearing a torch; the one to the left is lit, representing the day and perhaps spring, while the other is not, hinting at night and autumn.

The cult of Mithra was brought to Rome by the legions returning from the campaigns in Persia, and his victorious attributions and rigid hierarchy adapt well to the way of life of a soldier. The places of worship of this eastern god are found wherever our troops gather, from the African deserts to the fertile coasts of the Mare Nostrum, the misty lands beyond the Vallum, or along the Germanic limes.



DESCRIPTION OF THE XIII REGIONES

I shall now provide details about the thirteen regions into which is presently divided the Province of Italia, with particular attention to the road network, essential to control of the land, and the main settlements. I will also try to include any details of interest and notes on the local dangers, as, in spite of its long history, our beautiful peninsula still hides mysteries and threats even its present-day inhabitants are not aware of.

I will often mention places still under unknown influences, or, on the contrary, familiar magical forces, as well as sacred grounds. Do not be surprised, however, if this description is not as deep, as I have left to the Magister of the Augurs the task of providing you a highly classified report of the magical and religious details of our land.

REGIO I

LATIUM AND CAMPANIA

This region is the true heart of the Empire, and is rightly considered first among all those that make up the Province of Italia. It is made up of two large territories that should be considered to be one, even at the administrative level, for they have always been united.

Although Latium, heart of the Empire, appears to be a well-known region without notable mysteries, supernatural forces still roam it. Our fathers, shepherds and farmers, knew well the ancient gods of the fields and woods that we have now forgotten. Nymphs still dwell in our forests, and the god Silvanus still wanders the fertile lands, playing bucolic melodies on his reed flute.

What we call Latium is made up of two distinct parts: Latium Vetus (Old Latium) and New Latium. The former ranges from the river Tiberis to the Circaeus promontory, and has an extent of but 50 miles. So humble were the roots of the Empire. Later, it was extended by the addition of New Latium, to the Liris river, the present border with Campania.

This region is probably the wealthiest and most elegant in the entire Empire. The road network is at the service of the Urbs and the main production hubs, directly connected to the Capital. In addition to the consular roads, there are two more key roads that link the Urbs to its harbors: the Via Ostiensis, headed to Ostia, and the Via Portuensis, leading to the Claudian harbor. They are works of incredible ingenuity, for they were built on top of the numerous mires and bogs of the mouth of the Tiberis.

The fine Imperial engineers, in addition, have dug a navigable canal, the *Fossa Neronis,* to connect fertile Campania Felix to the harbor of Ostia. Another canal, the *Fossa Julia*, crosses the Pontine Marshes, plagued by unhealthy air and mosquitoes.

Campania is serviced by the Via Domitiana, which connects the important market city of Puteoli to the Via Appia, and is a sight to behold; it goes through the mount above Cumae and its monumental Arcus Felix, a passage audaciously cut by the architect Cocceius on behalf of Agrippa. This region also hosts one of the main centers of arcane power in Italia, the hall of the Cumaean Sibylla, prophetess of Apollo, whose responses are often consulted by the god himself. The area around the Phlegraean Fields is pervaded with intense magical influences that make its crossing dangerous, in spite of its key importance to the Empire.

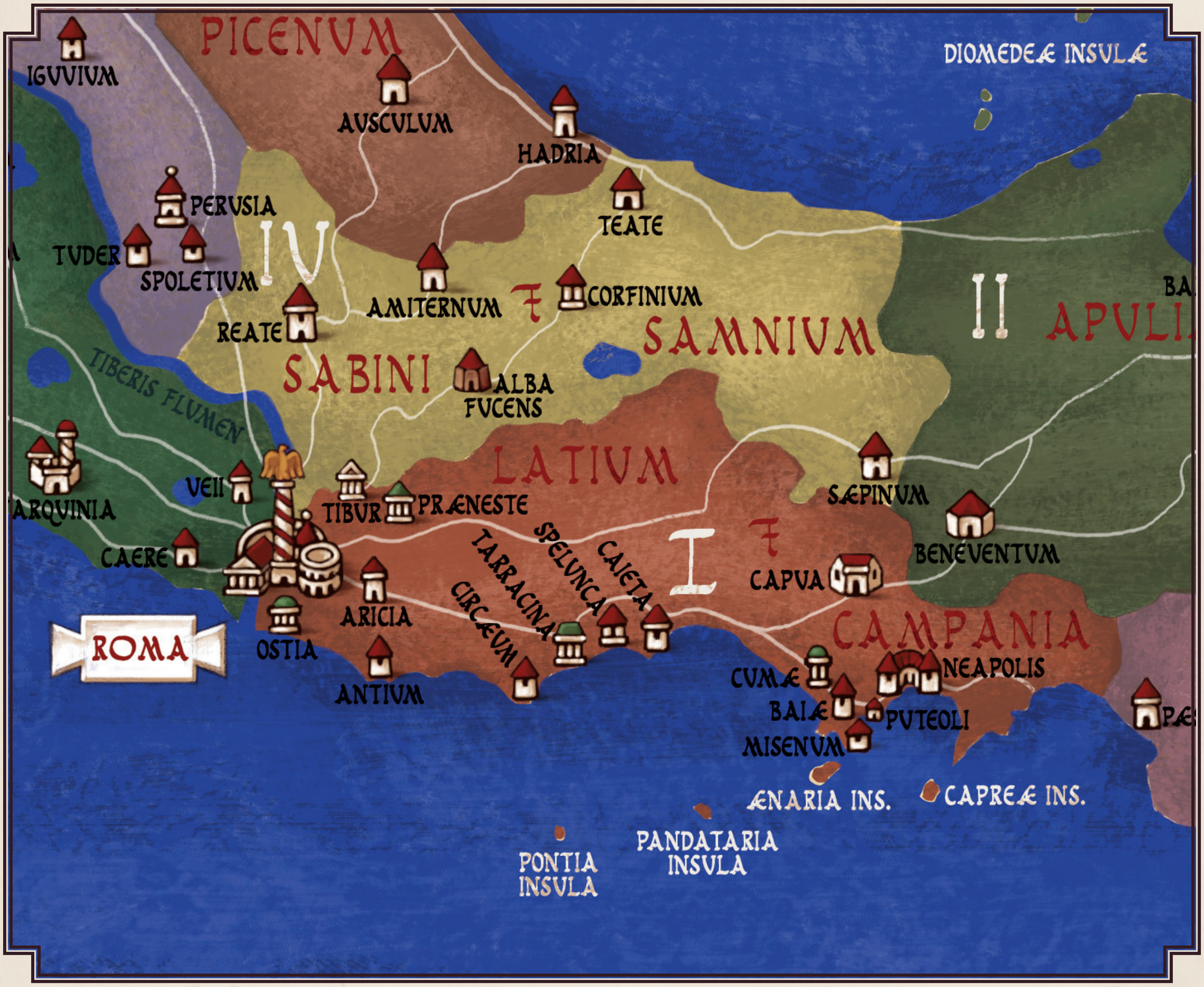
Numerous are the cities in this territory, although not as large or powerful, eclipsed by the might of Rome. In inner Latium Vetus, I cannot fail to mention Tibur and Praeneste, the two most important settlements after the Urbs.

Tibur. A city located on the only passage connecting the upper and lower basins of the river Anio, making it the key to Latium Vetus coming from Sabina, it has enjoyed the status of de facto “frontier” for a long time. Presently, it is known for the temple of Hercules Victor (see page 85) and the beautiful villas in the surrounding countryside, the most famous of which is the one that belonged to Emperor Hadrianus.

Praeneste. A town of great religious importance, site of the grand shrine to Fortuna Primigenia (see page 88), often attended by mothers due to the statue of her breastfeeding infant Jupiter and Juno, it is also a place of auguries. Here is kept a small sacred olive-wood box that contains numerous prophecies written on oak bark. Upon request, the sortes are drawn out by the hand of a child, inspired by Fortuna, great crowds often patiently waiting even entire days for their turn. The shrine is connected to Rome by the Via Prænestina, and the city is also known for its roses and the related expensive ointment, *rhodinum*.

Aricia. Close to one of the most ancient cities of this region, in Aricia, the nymph Egeria, struck by grief when Numa Pompilius died, sought refuge. It is said that, to ease her sufferings, Diana turned her into an as-of-yet-unknown magic spring. Legend has it that those who find and drink from it receive magical gifts; their body grows supernaturally vigorous, their senses sharpen, their skin toughens, or anything else the whimsical nymph feels like bestowing upon them, including occasional afflictions. Close by are the Lacus Nemorensis and the famous shrine to Diana Aricina. Only a fleeing slave can aspire to become the priest of the goddess, called Rex Nemorensis, after they have taken a branch from a particular tree in the sacred woods around the lake and then killed the acting Rex in a duel (see page 70).

On the coast are worthy of mention Antium, one of the first Roman colonies, Tarracina, and Caieta, with its harbor. The most important, however, is Ostia, amoenissima civitas (most pleasant city), and the vast docks to its north.


PICENVM
IGVVIVM
AVSCVLVM
HADRIA
DIOMEDEÆ INSVLÆ
TEATE
PERVSIA
TVDER
SPOLETIVM
IV
AMITERNVM
CORFINIVM
II
BA
APVLI
SAMNIVM
REATE
SABINI
ALBA FVCENS
TIBERIS FLVMEN
LATIVM
ARQVINIA
VEII
TIBVR
PRÆNESTE
SPELVNCA
CAIETA
TARRACINA
CIRCÆVM
I
SÆPINVM
BENEVENTVM
CAPVA
CAERE
ROMA
OSTIA
ARICIA
ANTIVM
CAMPANIA
CVMÆ
NEAPOLIS
BAIÆ
PVTEOLI
PÆ
MISENVM
ÆNARIA INS.
CAPREÆ INS.
PANDATARIA INSVLA
PONTIA INSVLA

Ostia. The de facto first Roman colony, it was founded by our fourth king, Ancus Marcius, to defend the mouth of the Tiberis and prevent invaders from reaching the heart of the Urbs from there. The citadel was surrounded by salt mines, and so it supplied Rome with this precious commodity. The settlement grew quickly and attracted an ever-growing population, as the Urbs grew and its needs followed suit. Now it is a suburb of Rome, and its beaches are often chosen by our patricians for their villas.

Along its wide streets, travelers, functionaries, traders, and foreigners crowd its roads both day and night. The Forum of Corporations is the heart of the economic life of the city, a vast square with porches and sixty or more buildings of trade companies and ship owners from all over the world. They are also the reference for strangers in Rome on business, who can ask for help or advice from people from their own lands who are familiar with the local customs and laws. Every office features mosaic floors decorated with the crest and the name of the corporation owning it. There are also located bankers and money changers. This great trading hub, however, is threatened by the same Tiberis that brings so many gifts to the Urbs. In its long mountain flow, it deposits at its mouth large amounts of earth and debris. The Africus ventus makes matters worse, as it pushes such deposits against the shores.

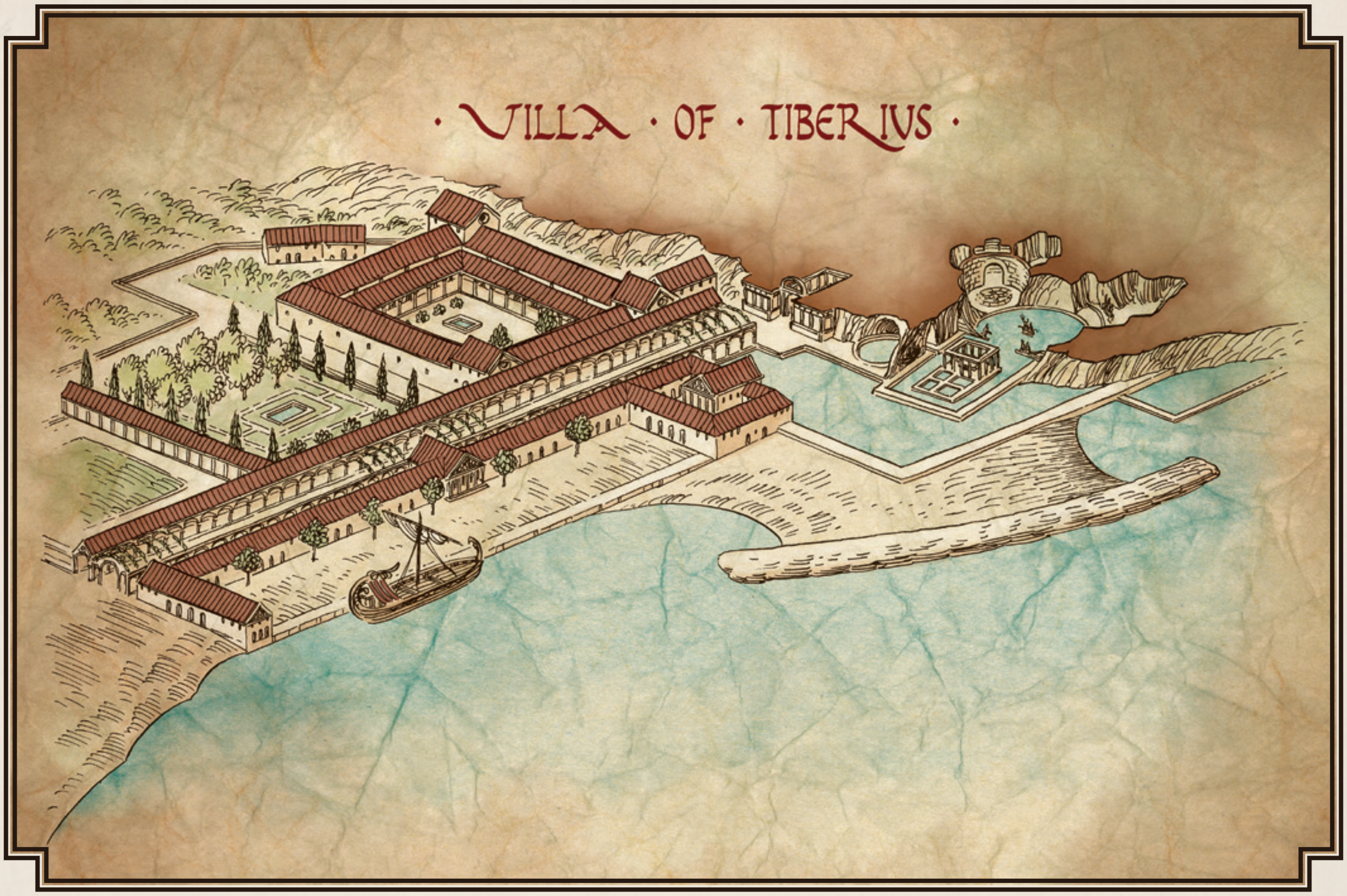
To avoid the Urbs not receiving its supplies anymore, the Divine Claudius, with tenacious ardor and at enormous expense, commissioned a new harbor two miles to the north of the mouth of the Tiberis, in a natural inlet, to solve that problem and shorten sailing time to the city. At each extreme of the bay, he had a great dock laid, to close the basin, and a majestic four-tiered lighthouse at its entrance completed the work. This harbor, too, unfortunately proved to be subject to the whims of Mater Natura, as the winds blowing from the southwest are so violent as to cause storms even inside the vast basin, and in time irreparably damaged the left pier. The Divine Trajan then called for a new, titanic work, the building of an inner harbor, connected by canals to Claudius', which came to form an antechamber of sorts. It is still to this day an efficient marvel of Roman engineering and architecture, formed by a perfectly hexagonal basin surrounded by warehouses and service buildings. Another vast canal, the Fossa Traiana, connects it to the Tiberis, allowing supplies to be easily shipped to the Urbs.

Antium. The foundation of this city is attributed to Aeneas' son, Ascanius, or the son of Ulysses and Circe. A rebellious city in the past, often harshly punished for its revolts against Roman rule, its proud inhabitants were also pirates, and raided their way as far as the Mare Aegeum. Now, however, there is nothing left of their old warlike spirit, and this strip of coastal land is dotted with luxurious villas belonging to the aristocracy of both the Urbs and the local area. There, for example, M. Tullius Cicero had his villa, and even the Divine Augustus often spent time there. Caligula, in his foolishness, seems to have even wanted to move the capital of the Empire there, and it was there that Poppea gave birth to Nero's first daughter. The city does not have a natural harbor, but its importance as a **sea town** comes from its being the coastal access of Praeneste and other inner cities. It is also placed on a crossroads of important roads, the most used of which is the Via Severiana, which joins Ostia to Tarracina.

Tarracina. This city occupies an exceptional strategic position, so much so that it has been called "the Thermopylae of Italia". An impressive cluster of roads joins here. From the west and the northwest come the Severiana and Appia, and from the north and northeast come those from the valley of the Liris. The ancient name of this town is Anxur, in the language of its ancient Volscian lords. The surrounding lands are famous for Caecubum wine, although perhaps even better known is the shrine to Jupiter, built on an imposing artificial terrace on the mountain above the city.

Spelunca. Further down south on the Via Flacca is Spelunca. So pleasant and calm in the day, it is equally unnerving at night. The local fishermen never approach the famous villa of Emperor Tiberius, as they say white and incorporeal figures pace its grounds when the full moon rises. They believe these spirits are the souls of the young lovers of the dissolute Emperor, fed to his eels after he had grown bored of them. He kept them at the entrance of the famous cave with precious statues that gave the name to the entire area, where the Emperor held his famous feasts.

Caieta. A small town that acts as the port of the inner Formiae, it is also known for its patrician villas.



VILLA OF EMPEROR TIBERIUS - ENCOUNTERS TABLE

Roll 1d10 when appropriate. These encounters happen only at night.

D10 roll	Event
1-3	**Deserted halls.** Nothing seems to disturb the peace of the empty and desolate rooms or the hallways painted by the masters of the time.
4	**Eternal watcher.** The Custodes are approached by a man wearing a praetorian uniform of sorts. In a low and annoying voice, he claims to be the guardian of the villa, tasked with preventing any intruders from entering its grounds. If refused or asked too many questions, he reveals his undead nature, too loyal to his ancient task (use the profile of the Silent Warriors, with DV8 instead of DV6).
5	**Restless shadows.** Long hallways can confuse even the best trackers. A **Sensibilitas** roll (DT 9) allows the group to spot deformed shadows ahead of them. If the characters react or show unease in any way, the shadows vanish (the group's next encounter roll is automatically 7).
6	**The nursery.** The Custodes pass by the nursery at the entrance of the cave and the statues that gave the name to the town itself. The characters who pass a **Sensibilitas** roll (DT 6) hear a young male voice desperately asking for help, which seems to come from the mud that has filled the very nursery pools. Those Custodes who start digging in the mud not only find nothing, but must pass a **Ratio** roll (DT 6) or be plagued by terrible nightmares every night for the next week. During that period, they are considered *Fatigued*.
7	**Phantasmal Feast.** From one of the main halls, sounds and voices hint at a banquet with tens of guests. As soon as the group reaches the hall, it is empty, like all others.
8	**The guardians of the villa.** In a recess of a vast deserted hall is the Lar familiaris, the small shrine to the Lares, protectors the house. They are bronze statuettes of two young dancers in revealing clothes, wearing boots and crowns. They hold a horn from which flows a liquid into a bucket they hold with their other hands. On the ground, in proximity to what is left of a fire, are flowers, wine, eggs, and pine nuts. A strange atmosphere hangs in the room. The characters who offer the proper devotions to the Lares can roll **De Magia** to recover Pietas (see *Recovering Pietas* on page 79 of the Core Rulebook).
9	**Love and hatred.** The souls of the young lovers of Emperor Tiberius still wander the villa, thirsting for the blood of the living! The Custodes must face the rage of their Larvae (1:1).
10	**Thirst for vengeance.** The spirit of Sejanus, Prefectus Praetor executed by Emperor Tiberius for crimes in Rome, seeks vengeance (use the profile of the Larvae, with DV10 instead of DV8). Defeating him yields 1 Experience Point.

THE GOVERNOR OF THE PROVINCE OF ITALIA

Gaius Lampridius Valentinianus
Value: DV10
1 die: De Bello, De Corpore, Hit Points, Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Scientia (Law), De Societate, Ratio
3 dice: De Societate (Politics)
Hit Points: 10
Weapons: Pugio (Damage 3)
Protections: Lorica Musculata (Protection 10), only during public appearances

Relatively young for his office, the thirty-five-year-old Gaius Lampridus Valentinianus is a cunning and smart man, always with a joke ready, but always serious when the circumstances demand it. His career has been as quick as it has been brilliant, bringing him to administer the most important province of the Empire at an age at which the majority of the noble Roman scions are still praetors.

His *cursus honorum* is nothing short of impressive. He was responsible for coinage minting at twenty, thanks to an uncle on his mother's side who was the director of the mint of Rome. At twenty-three, he became military tribune for one of the three praetorian Cohorts defending Rome, its commander betrothed to his sister Lampridia. His popularity peaked when, as an aedilis, he was tasked with organizing the ludi of the Eternal City (he also gathered a considerable wealth by winning numerous bets by proxy). No one can remember more sumptuous and stunning ludi than his. He was so well known in that period that all approved of his appointment as urban praetor of Rome, and, after but two years, his elevation to the rank of consul alongside the firstborn of the Emperor. By then intimate with the Imperial family, he married beautiful Severina, daughter of the Emperor's own brother from his first marriage, and eventually took the office of Governor of Italia. He lives in Rome in an elegant urban villa on the Caelian Hill, surrounded by famous gardens, the Horti Lampridiani, which his munificence allows to open monthly to the public.

He spends much of his time alongside the Imperial family in one of the twelve villas of Capreae. He also has a most secret relationship with a pantomime actress, buxom Artemisia, although he resorts to every method to prevent the tryst from being discovered, not as much out of fear of his wife's reaction, but to keep the favor of the Imperial family and, as a consequence, his position.

Circaeum Promontory. The Circaeum mount is worthy of its own mention, hardly seen by the sailors who go about the silvery waters of Latium. It is often covered by a thick mist that the skeptics call fog and humidity, but the locals claim to be the breath of the terrible witch who once lived there. According to the geographer Strabo, once the promontory was an isle called Aeaea or Eea, theater of the famous legends about Ulysses and Circe. In truth, the matter is still fiercely debated, and to this day we do not know the precise location of the Isle of Circe, although the area is thought to still be under the influence of the famous enchantress. To ingratiate her, the locals have built a shrine on the so-called Promontory of Venus, said to be a place of prodigies (see page 111). Around Circaeum is the wonderful villa Domitiana, now Imperial property.

The Islands of Pontia and Pandataria. In front of the coasts of Latium is a series of isles, Pontia and Pandataria among them, sadly known as the place of exile for the members of the Imperial family, still prisons in spite of all their comforts. Among their illustrious prisoners number Caligula's sisters, Agrippina and Julia, and the scandalous daughter of Augustus, Julia Augusti.

The sweet land of Campania Felix seems, indeed, to be beloved by the gods. Beyond the course of the Liris begin the vineyards and the hills, and, in the verses of Plinius the Elder, it looks like Bacchus and blonde Ceres compete with one another, as the fertile earth of the region yields both wines among the most sought-after and abundant wheat. The Falernian wine, Caecubum, Calenum, and even the beloved wheat-based drink, alica, are famed all over the world.

Its beaches are known for their molluscs and fish, and nowhere else is olive liquor as hearty. All, in short, seems dedicated to the pleasure of man. This fortunate region is crossed for the most part by the Via Appia, and the Via Popilia connects together the inner settlements parallel to the coasts as it leads to Rhegium. The Via Domitiana links Puteoli with the Via Appia after running along the coast northwards, as it allows reaching that traffic artery without requiring passing through Capua.

On the coast are Cumae (known all over the world for its Sibylla, prophetess of Apollo), elegant Baiae, the military harbor of Misenum, Puteoli, Neapolis, and the two islands of Aenaria and Capreae, beloved by Emperor Tiberius, where the Imperial villas still enrich the landscape to this day (I myself spend a few months there every year).

Cumae. Uncharacteristically important for its contained size, its keep houses the shrine to Apollo with the cave from which the Sibylla dispenses her omens (see page 80). In addition to the religious complex, worthy of mention are the Pass of Agrippa, which allows the lower city to communicate with the docks (by the famous architect Cocceius, to whom Agrippa entrusted the military enhancement of the area), and the Arcus Felix, audaciously cut out of the mountain to allow the Via Domitiana to pass through.

Around the city, all over the area of the Flaegrean Fields, hangs a dense supernatural atmosphere that we can barely control, thanks to the presence of the Sibylla. In spite of this, patrols watching the banks of Lakes Lucrinus and Avernus to protect the military harbor, the Portus Julius, often report sudden flashes in the fog, mysterious howls, or the braying of unnatural hunting horns, and I must sadly add that some of those men never returned.

Baiae. Very different is the atmosphere of Baiae, a city whose gentle climate and amiable landscapes have always attracted the summer residences of Rome's powerful, Cicero remembering this city as the byword for pleasure, trysts, adultery, banquets, feasts, song, music, and boat trips. In truth, it is not an actual city, either in the architectural sense, as it does not even have a core of public buildings, or in the institutional sense, as it depends on Cumae, but rather a conglomerate of villas, thermae, and hotels. Luxury here takes on a new meaning, one that not even Rome can match. Much of its appeal is due to the plentiful hot springs, which are said to heal a great many afflictions, and the presence of "fumaroles" that can be harnessed into steam baths. The fertility of the earth has encouraged numerous landowners to exploit the grounds of the villas, or, in the case of those closer to the seaside, set pools for fish and seafood breeding, the famous *piscinae maritimae* and the *ostraria*, which have become almost more profitable than farming. To provide scale, remember that Caius Hirrio, who provided himself 6,000 eels for the triumph banquet of Julius Caesar, sourced them from here. In addition, the proximity of Baiae to the banks of Puteoli allows one, during one's otium, to fruitfully follow one's business.

Misenum. Close to the south is Misenum, once a small town, but now base of the Imperial fleet in western Italia, much like Ravenna is for eastern. The fleet, like Ravenna's, bears the title of "Praetoria" for its great strategic and political importance, as its role is similar to that of the bodyguards of the Emperor. It is commanded by the Praefectus Classis Aulus Plinius Iucundus and is made up of an *hexareme* flagship, with its six imposing rows of oars, and numerous triremes, quadriremes, quinqueremes, and some faster liburnae. A special detachment of sailors from Misenum is tasked with operating the rigging of the *velarium* in the Flavian Amphitheater.

THE PRAEFECTUS CLASSIS OF MISENUM

Aulus Plinus Iucundus
Value: DV8
1 die: Hit Points, Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Bello, De Corpore, De Natura, De Scientia, De Societate
3 dice: De Bello (Tactics), De Natura (Sailing), Ratio
Hit Points: 8
Weapons: Gladius (Damage 6)
Protections: Lorica Plumata (Protection 6), when not embarked

The admiral of the Misenum fleet is an aging man, thin but quick as a reed. A great scholar, he is known for a series of scientific works about every aspect of the natural world. Science for him is capital, and for it he has often put himself in danger, like the one time he risked drowning in the heart of a storm while studying lightning bolts. Generally, Plinus Iucundus is a man of thought and piercing intelligence, who prefers to resolve political and military emergencies with skillful diplomacy, rather than threats or the strength of arms, the reason behind his elevation to such an esteemed office.

Service demands Aulus Plinus Iucundus live in Campania, in the military port of Misenum, where he has a simple lodging with a well-stocked library. However, he also owns a wonderful villa in Baiae, its park growing all manner of medicinal herbs and holding a small pen of exotic beasts, where he gladly returns whenever his obligations allow him. In the villa live also his sister Secundilla, a precocious widow, and her adolescent son, Trebo.

Puteoli. After Cape Misenum, opens the bay of Puteoli, a trading town with a magnificent public market in a large court porch, decorated with polychrome marbles and sumptuous columns. Not any less imposing is the Flavian Amphitheater, contemporary to its homonymous one in Rome. The wealth of Puteoli is shown by another, smaller, amphitheater, as no other city save the Urbs itself has two such buildings so close to one another, although perhaps no other city has the same passion for the gladiatorial games! The harbor of Puteoli is one of the most important of the Empire, as here head the cargo vessels of the Classis Alexandrina, bearing Egyptian wheat to the Capital, and here converge the spices, slaves, wine, and precious wares meant for the markets of the Capital.

Neapolis. In the great gulf of Campania is Greek Neapolis. The city is so strongly tied to its sea that its main cults are those of marine deities, like the Sirens and Aphrodite Euploia, who oversees pleasant sailing. From here and from Velia come the priestesses of the cult of Ceres in Rome. In the gulf are the islands of Pithecusa (which we call Aenaria) and Capreae, the former settled in ancient times by the Greeks and famous for its healing waters that cure renal afflictions. The latter, and smaller, is part of the patrimonium principis and is administered by the Procurator Caesaris Augusti, who supervises the maintenance of the twelve villas of the Emperor and his agricultural holdings.

THE FATE OF POMPEII

In the city of Pompeii is set the adventure. *The Flames of Pompeii* (see *Mysteries of the Empire, Volume I*), three days before the fateful eruption of Vesuvius, when the tragic destiny of Pompeii and of the surrounding cities came to pass. The players therein act centuries before the creation of the Cohors Arcana and play as the *Custodes Arcani*, special incognito Imperial agents willed by Emperor Augustus. Depending on how that adventure ends, much of the paragraphs aside could change, and perhaps the death of brave Admiral Plinius could be avoided. Further details on the history of the Custodes can be found in the Core Ruleook and the *Encyclopaedia Arcana*.

THE AGORA SEPLASIA OF CAPUA

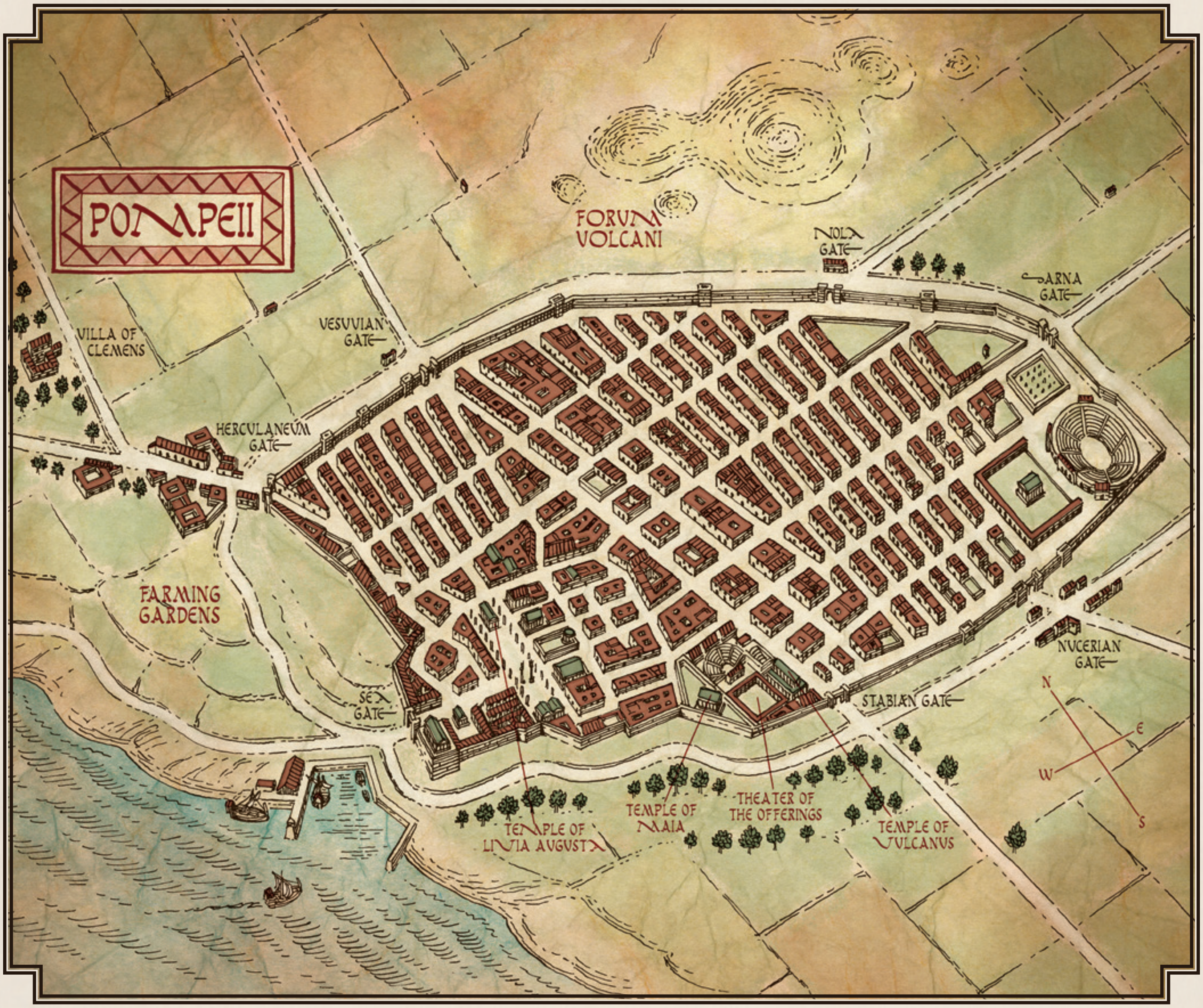
Capua does not have a singular forum for its endless dealings to take place in, but two. One bears the Roman name of *Forum* and is the official seat of political life, while the other still bears the name of *Agora* as an homage to the Greek origins of the city. It is the Agora Seplasia, a magnificent trading hub, in no way inferior to the Forum proper, where are bought and sold perfumes, often more expensive than gold. These are not just fragrances used by haughty ladies, but also precious oils and ointments, extracts of exotic herbs used in makeup as well as medicines and, alas, powerful poisons.

The entire area around Capua is dedicated to the production of a much-sought-after perfume, perhaps the most famous made in the West, the *rhodinon italikon*, a rose extract with unmatched intensity of fragrance and refinement.
Other fragrances are not made in loco, but imported from far away, and for the most precious substances the Capuan price is the standard for all the Western markets. Unfortunately, as money flows in great quantities, even the Seplasia is not spared the plague of fraud and smuggling. The area is watched over by the Vigiles, as well as the Cohors Arcana, to prevent the moving of materials destined for the dark arts.

This gulf seems to be often visited by Sirens, maidens with avian bodies whose magical song leads passing ships to ruin. Numerous are the references to them in the local toponyms, like the beautiful isle of Nesis that owes its name to the Siren who likes to spend time there, while Neapolis itself is also called Parthenope after the Siren buried there.

Capua. In the inner-most reaches of the region, I must mention the city of Capua, the "altera Roma" in Cicero's words. It is enough to look at its amphitheater to have a measure of its magnificence, the largest in the world after Rome's own. Its walls are imposing, with seven gates, and in one of its squares, the Seplasia, are sold its famous perfumes. Famed are its vessels and dishes, the so called *campana supellex*, made of iron or bronze and exported all over the world. Agriculture is highly specialized in textiles, relying on Puteoli for export, alongside which Capua forms a formidable economic power in strong competition with Neapolis.

The south of the Gulf of Neapolis was once green and prosperous, but its three cities are now sadly famous: **Pompeii**, **Herculaneum**, and **Stabiae**. The destructive wrath of Vesuvius deleted even their location, turning that bucolic plain into a sterile wasteland of ash. The tragic event was studied by Plinius the Elder, admiral of the Imperial Fleet stationed at Cape Misenum and wise researcher. He took to the sea on his ship as the eruption was happening to study its effects, and we well know what happened; the brave admiral fell, poisoned by the miasmas as he attempted to help families trapped in the villas on the seaside. What not many know is that it seems he did not leave much written about that event, hastily scribbled on the few tablets he had with him on board. In that text, Plinius seems to ascribe the disaster to an event that a few days before had aroused the wrath of the god Vulcan, traditionally held to live within Vesuvius. Plinius mentions an attempt by brave arcane investigators to placate this fury and avoid the calamity, potentially implying that his own presence at sea was somehow tied to that attempt. However, we must deduce that they failed.



REGIO II
APULIA, CALABRIA, AND HIRPINI

A region of ancient origin, made up of territories once inhabited by different tribes, its northern extremity covers the old lands of the Daunii and Peuceti, to the south was the land of the Messapi, and the western inland belonged to the Hirpini. A few cities that presently enjoy great importance were founded by the Greeks and rose to such opulence that it earned the whole of southern Italia the title of *Magna Graecia*. Numerous roads cross it, among them the Appia, Regina Viarum (Queen of Long Roads), which connects Rome to Tarentum, and the Via Traiana, coasting the Adriatic side and joining together all its settlements.
Each of these numerous people has left a mysterious inheritance, not entirely understood and assimilated by the Empire. Especially in the inner regions, primitive magical forces slither below the patina of civilization brought by the Empire, always ready to resurface.

I shall describe the ancient land of the Daunii first. Here settlements are numerous, although not of great extent. Noteworthy are Canusium, with its port Barduli, and the small town of Cannae, known for the battle of 537 AUC, which saw our troops defeated by the Carthaginian Hannibal.

Canusium. The old town rises on a small acropolis, but modern Canusium extends to the surrounding hills, dominating the Aufidus valley. The Greek origin of the settlement has never been forgotten, and the inhabitants are bilingual to this day. It is an important stop along the Via Traiana, and its main trade is working wool. Nearby **Barduli** is its access to the sea.

Midway between the two settlements is **Cannae.** The hill it stands upon grants it strategic importance for the control of the lower course of the Aufidus, explaining the battle that saw Hannibal victorious over our legions.

AROUND CANNAE – ENCOUNTERS TABLE

Roll 1d10 when appropriate. These encounters can happen during both the day and night.

D10 Roll	Event
1	**A forgotten story.** The sun-scorched plain seems to have shed any trace of the ancient battle. Nobody is there, and the most exciting thing one could do is chasing grasshoppers.
2	**Various wares.** The characters spot a few tents, their once bright colors now scorched by the sun. If they close in, they notice the tents forming a small and squalid market where they can buy cheap mementos like busts of Hannibal, shinbones of dead legionaries, splintered shields, and a few other meager things scavenged from the surroundings.
3	**The water seller.** A gaunt girl drags with evident effort an amphora with a large mouth. She approaches the Custodes, offering "the water that heals the fighters", a ladle's worth for half an as. A quick glance inside the amphora reveals turbid water and a faint green shadow on the edges of the container's mouth – not encouraging. In truth, the water is healthy, as the green shadow is a mold that prevents wounds from forming gangrene. It must not be drunk, but used to wash a wound. A healer or an expert scout can realize this by smelling the vessel (**De Natura** or **De Scientia** roll, DT 9).
4	**The descendants of the vanquished.** A sad-looking group (3:1) of Farmers wanders, singing funeral chants in an un intelligible language. They are Carthaginians who mourn their dead, killed by the cruel Romans. It is odd, but there are still some of them on Italic soil. If left be, they keep singing their songs and do not approach the group. If, instead, the group moves to them, they cannot contain their hatred for Rome, and it could easily degenerate into a fight.

5	**Yes, it is really me.** The Custodes see in front of them, a hundred or so meters away, a handsome man with a beaming smile, a famous actor (known for his portrayal of Vercingetorix) who played in numerous theaters of the Urbs and, although he retired a few years ago, still enjoys some popularity. The aging star is in the middle of the road, taking in the hills and preparing for his next play, where he is to interpret ferox Hannibal. On a successful **Sensibilitas** roll (DT 6), the Custodes spot a wagon rumbling at great speed towards the famous actor, and, if they rush to warn him, the known hero, drunk in spite of it being only morning, thinks they are his fans, asking about his real identity. The poor man, brandishing his impeccable smile, can only say a flattered, “Yes, it is really me,” before being trampled by the wagon!
6	**The sign of Tanit.** The Custodes see carved on a stone the symbol of the goddess Tanit, probably etched by a Carthaginian soldier after the battle of Cannae in tribute to the merciful deity. Recognizable on a successful **De Magia** roll (DT 6), the symbol grants to those present a +1 to Ratio rolls against Magic Powers for 1d3 months, if the stone is honored with a libation.
7	**The Stone.** The Custodes find a stone Scipio Aemilianus had carved in commemoration of the atrocities that occured on that plain and the deeds of his ancestor, the Africanus. Seeing the stone and remembering the harshness of these wars grants the Custodes 1 Experience Point.
8	**Punic weapons.** The Custodes see peeking through the grass on a hill a helmet, a shield, and a chestplate of the Carthaginian army. The weapons are recognizable by their characteristic copper color. Old and in bad shape (it has been almost seven hundred years), they accompanied the burial of Carthaginian officer who died at the time of the epic battle. If a Custos wants to take them, the burial is defiled, and the spirit of the Carthaginian will exact his vengeance on the characters and whoever may own his superb weapons (for the spirit of the vengeful Carthaginian, use the profile of the Larvae, with DV10 instead of DV8).
9	**The endless sadness.** All of a sudden, the countryside turns depressing, and the Custodes feel the Roman defeat on this sun-scorched, desolate plain hanging heavily on them. They feel pain, anger, and fear, and those Custodes who fail a **Sensibilitas** roll (DT 9) begin weeping in silence. It is the weight of the deaths of the eight legions who, in but an afternoon, were wiped out on this plain. Those who pass the roll are inspired by the sacrifice and recover 1d3 Pietas each.
10	**Hannibal.** The Custodes see, at night, a rider on the hill from which Polybius claims Hannibal observed the fields of Cannae the night before the fateful battle. The man is tall and dressed in Carthaginian armor and, if the Custodes close in, turns on his horse and vanishes into the night. If, however, the Custodes call him Hannibal, the ghost commands them not to move any closer and, in Greek, tells them in short, harsh sentences that Rome shall soon meet its end, as it happened for his beloved Carthago, “for he has seen it before dying”. After the disconcerting revelation, it starts raining. Was it really Hannibal?

Diomedean Isles. Far off the northern coast are the Diomedean Isles, a stop for those headed eastwards, and inhabited by a legendary species of birds called Diomedean, which Plinius named *cataractae* (see page 30).

In Peucetia, the most important settlements are undoubtedly **Barium** and **Egnathia**. Barium is a port of some import that services numerous inner cities, while Egnathia is famous all over the Empire for its refined pottery, often faked, resulting in great damage to their exports. Unfortunately, the area is subject to frequent swamping, making maintenance of the road network a necessary and expensive constant. Continuing down south is the land of the Messapi, whose plains yield bountiful oil and wine for trade.

Brundisium. Of Messapic origin, then inhabited by the Greeks, it now is an important center for the Empire. Here ends the Via Appia, and its port is the key to the East. Emperor Trajan departed from here for his victorious expedition in Dacia in 858 AUC, celebrated on the reliefs of his honorary column in Rome. The town is wealthy and vibrant, and it is not rare to see more modest homes right beside monumental buildings, or even crowded insulae. Its streets are packed with sailors and traders of all countries, often with rather disorderly consequences.

Tarentum. Another important center is Tarentum, a city among the most opulent of the Empire. Queen of a vast territory in Greek times, it gave shelter to the philosopher Plato during his travels, and gave birth to and was ruled by the mathematician Archytas for a few years. Its power is still today notable, and legendary (as well as greatly envied) are the jewels worn by its maidens. The production of expensive fabrics only adds to an already considerable wealth.

Hirpinia, dense with mysteries, is named after the Samnite tribe that once controlled it, the Hirpini. It is said they could turn into wolves under specific circumstances, and they considered the wolf their spiritual guide (see page 103). The word *hirpus*, in fact, in their ancient language means "wolf". I believe, then, that some of the inhabitants of this area possess the same skills some warriors consecrated to Wodan or Fenrir from the Province of Germania and Germania Magna are said to possess.

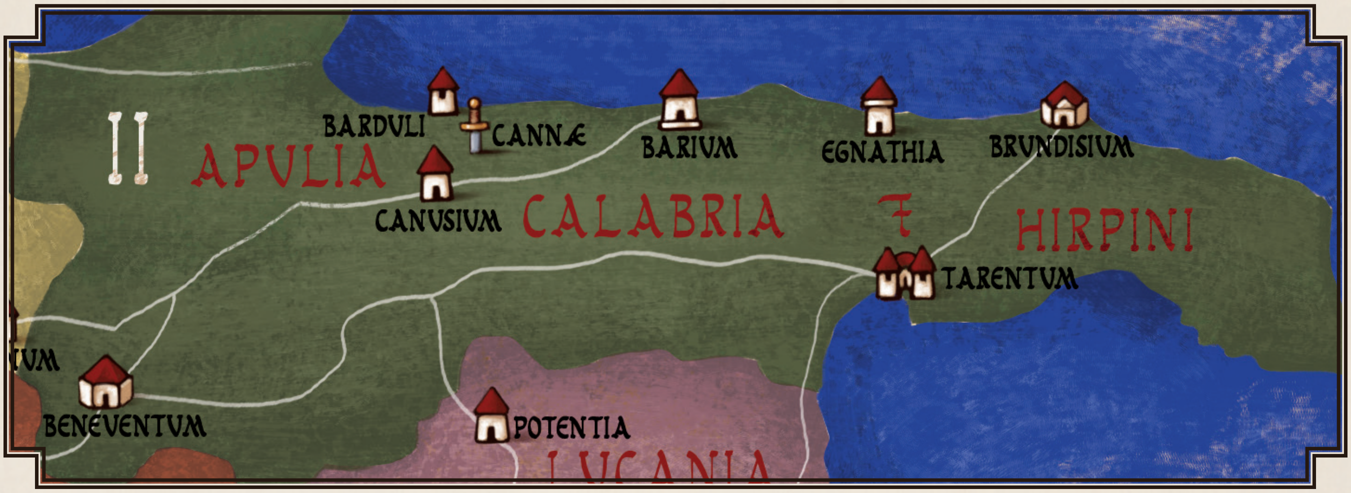
Beneventum. This is the only settlement of some relevance, known for our victory of 478 AUC over Pyrrhus, after which it changed name from from Maleventum to the more auspicious one it bears now. Today, it enjoys some prosperity as a *statio* on the Via Appia. It is rightfully proud of its red granite obelisks, adorning the temple of Isis built by Flavius Domitianus. and the honorary arch of the Divine Trajan, one of the most beautiful among these monuments. The region of Beneventum is famous for being inhabited by witches, and it is said that they gather twice a year at the foot of an old and secret tree to plot and scheme (see page 114). The rumor is not confirmed, but it is sure that the women here are unusual, with a strange gaze, and even the youngest, almost children, have in their stare something remote and ancient.

DIOMEDES, HERO AND TRAVELER

This Greek, originally king of the rich city of Argos, here played a key role in the development of the Italic civilizations on the Adriatic coast. He took part in the Trojan War with such bravery that Homer dedicated to him the fifth stanza of the *Iliad*. It was he, among all the Greek heroes, who wounded Aeneas with a spear, who was saved only by the intervention of the divine Venus, earning the Aechean hero the vengeance of the goddess.

Once the war was over, he returned to Argos, but Venus, in retribution, had erased his memory from the minds of his people, even his wife and children.

Wracked by pain and bereft of a people, Diomedes took to the sea again with some old companions and headed to the Adriatic coasts of Italia. He visited numerous lands and always left gifts to the local people, such as teaching them how to domesticate and breed horses and how to sail, and even helping found cities. To him we owe Ancon, Andria, Beneventum, Brundisium, Canusium, Histonium, Sipontum, Venafrum, and Venusia. The last one was dedicated to the goddess Venus, who by then had forgiven him. Diomedes then settled down as a guest of the Daunii, where he married the daughter of the king, beautiful Euippe. Eventually, feeling his end drawing near, Diomedes set sail again and landed on the largest of the Diomedean Isles. Here, he drew his last breath, and the goddess Minerva, for his service to humanity, turned him into a spirit of the sea. Since then, it is said that Diomedes watches over those who sail the waters he crossed in life.



REGIO III
LUCANIA AND BRUTII

This region, too, is made up of two ethnically different lands that in ancient times were distinct. Lucania is the northern most part, while the whole peninsula is surrounded by the Tyrrhenum and Ionicum Seas makes up Brutium proper. The former is serviced by the Via Herculia and the latter by the Via Popilia. There are no large urban centers in Lucania, not even its most important cities.

Paestum. Among its noteworthy cities is Paestum, Greek Poseidonia, which played such a key role in the wars against Hannibal and is now a well-attended religious center. The suburban shrine, dedicated to the goddess Demeter (our Ceres), is a well-known pilgrimage destination, but the town temples also welcome a great many visitors. Such religious significance is reinforced by the presence, a few miles to the north, of another famous shrine at the mouth of the Silerus dedicated to the goddess Hera of Argos. This "Heraion" has always been one of the most famous places of worship in Magna Graecia. After the damage suffered during the fateful eruption of Vesuvius, its importance has decreased, but it has remained a center of great religious influence (see page 92).

Velia. On the Tyrrhenic coast is the city of Velia, known for its pleasant climate and for being one of birthplaces of the priestesses of Ceres in Rome. The city, sadly, suffers greatly from the progressive swamping of its harbor.

Inner Lucania is an area of complex management. First, it is steep and not much serviced by Imperial roads, the only one crossing its mountainous territory in any usable capacity being the Via Herculia. It is better, then, to avoid the woods, infested with wolves and, it is said, those who command them (see page 104). Whether or not these rumors are true, the locals are proud and often hostile. Back in the days of Hannibal, as the coastal cities had taken our side, the inner ones defected in mass to the enemy, while, centuries later, the region was the theater of Spartacus' revolt. Now it is not economically dynamic due to the excessive spreading of the latifundium. The only cities worthy of notice are **Potentia** and **Grumentum**.

The land of the Bruttii is made up of an area of Greek influence on the coasts and the inner mountains. The latter was inhabited in the past by a people whose strength was legendary, supposedly named after the enormous physical prowess of the primordial warriors who halted the Greek expansion from the coast inwards. The region of the Bruttii is serviced by the Via Popilia, which from Capua reaches Rhegium, passing by Consentia and Hipponion.

THE ISLE OF ANTHEMOESSA

Far off the northwestern coasts of the region, almost on the border with Campania, is said to be mythical isle of Anthemoessa, home of the Sirens.
Nobody knows what this isle looks like, for setting foot on it means death. It is said, however, that it is not difficult to recognize it once nearby; its beaches are shining white, and when struck by sun or moonlight they gleam so strongly they can be seen from far away, like a mirror. Those who see such an effect, however, should despair, as those coasts do not shine from fine sand, but from the bones of the unfortunate drawn there by the songs of the Sirens. Some sailors crash on the rocky coasts, as the song of the Sirens robs them of their skill in governing a ship. Others, even crazier, dive overboard, believing they can swim to the shore. They never get there, however, as they drown well before, for the island is more distant than it looks. The waves, then, drag the bodies onto the shore, so nobody has ever set a living foot on them. Some, however, have tried to find it to take its true treasure: soil. It is said that the earth of the isle is magically fertile, capable of nurturing plants not found anywhere else, such as healing and magical plants, even the Egyptian one said to be capable of resurrecting the dead, silphium (additional information is in the *Aegyptus – The Sands of Gold and Time* module). That soil feeds on the blood of the shipwrecked, using it to nurture the wonderful flowers growing there. In Greek, the word *anthemoessa* means "blooming". The Sirens, it is said, love the flowers of their isle, and for this draw in so many unlucky travelers.

Rhegium. On the Tyrrhenic side of Bruttium, there are not many other noteworthy settlements. It was founded by the Greeks on the furthest reach of the peninsula, and now it is a settlement of some importance, with beautiful walls. The narrow channel off its coast is considered one of the most dangerous places in the Empire, a segment of sea full of deadly eddies.

MONSTROUS SCYLLA

Few know that the monster hidden among the rocks nearby Rhegium was once a beautiful maiden, a nymph of the sea, famous for her magnificent blue eyes. Although she lived in the waters around the coasts of Calabria, Scylla often went swimming in the warm waters of Zancle, in Sicilia. There, Glaucus, a mortal turned into a half-man and half-fish sea spirit by Circe, saw Scylla and fell in love with her. The nymph, however, rejected his love. Glaucus then asked the very Circe for a love potion for Scylla, in what would then prove to be a rather careless move. Circe, in fact, was in turn in love with Glaucus, and took revenge for his not reciprocating her feelings by punishing the nymph instead. The witch gave Glaucus a cursed potion and told him to pour it in the waters where she usually swam. When Scylla bathed, her body transformed into something terrible. She grew five more heads, each with three rows of teeth. Around her waist sprouted six hellhound heads, always howling, and her legs split into ten more sea serpents.

Poor Scylla hid forever under a menacing cliff around Rhegium, maddened and furious for such a fate. Since then, she has attacked anything coming too close. None can cross the strait without fear of being dragged to her den and a terrible end.

Scylla
Degree of Danger: 5
Size: 4
Value: DV12
1 die: Damage, Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Bello, De Corpore
3 dice: Hit Points
Hit Points: 36
Protections: Monstrous skin (Protection 12)

- *Special Abilities:* Acute Senses, Grab
- *Magic Powers:* Extra Arms (6) – simulating the advantage in combat given by her additional heads, Multiple Heads (5), Terror (2DV, the victim must *see* Scylla)

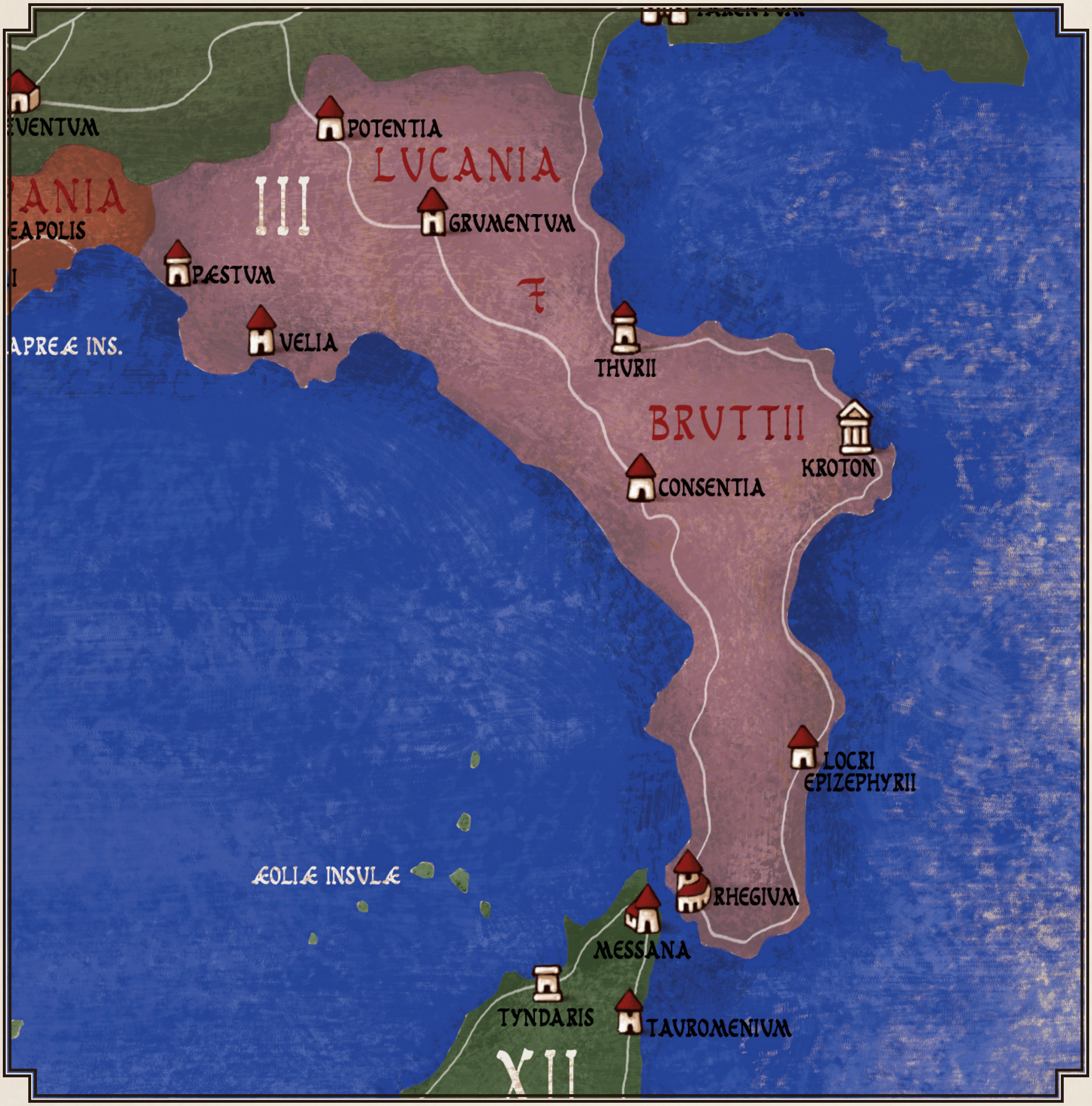
On the Italic side is a cliff, below which is rumored to live a monstrous creature named Scylla (see sidebar), while in the depths of the sea on the Sicilian side is said to hide the monster Charybdis (see page 54). Every sailor knows how difficult it is to cross the straits on a vessel, as they must keep the exact same distance between the two monsters, fighting against winds and currents that buffet the ships that close too much with either shore.

The Ionic side of the region hosts a few cities once of great importance, but now not much more than small towns.

Thurii. Rising on the location of ancient Sibaris, destroyed by Kroton in 309 AUC, this town has nothing of the ancient splendor that made it the synonym of luxury, not to mention that those lands are suspected to be ridden with malaria.

Kroton. This town, once of great power back in the Greek days, is now but a fortified castle. It is the seat of a strange, pseudo-religious sect, the Pythagoreans. They claim to follow the famous philosopher and mathematician Pythagoras of Samo, who took refuge here, as he had been exiled from his motherland. They are vegetarian, and contemplate silence and other ascetic practices through which they aim to break the cycle of earthen rebirth they call "metempsychosis". Presently, all town offices are held by them, and they rule the city as a theocracy of sorts. Some of our observers report that they seem to have magical knowledge about nature, which they mask under the guise of scientific studies. The entire town is for this reason kept under discrete surveillance by envoys of the Augurs, undercover agentes in rebus, of whom nobody knows the identities (see page 141).

Locri Epizephyrii. Once rich and powerful, the city of Locri Epizephyrii is now a small town. Even the nearby temple of Zeus Olympian, once site of a great treasure of war plunder, as large as it still is, is now declining. Many have wondered about the reason behind such a large number of people in such an isolated area, and some claim the local priests produce or are in possession of some mysterious magical ingredient they sell at a hefty price, while others say the temple is an espionage base of some foreign power (they suspect Sparta). Locri, however, hides other mysteries. Here is one of the few shrines dedicated to the underground goddess Proserpina, called with her Greek name of Persephone. It is suspected that still today they practice sacred prostitution, tolerated during the Greek domination, but now prohibited, and there are even those who claim that not only do the local noble maidens offer themselves to the service of the goddess, but also Roman ones, earning the coffers of the shrine much gold. Inland, the city of **Consentia** is worthy of mention, once the capital of the Bruttii.


VENTVM
POTENTIA
LVCANIA
ANIA
III
EAPOLIS
GRVMENTVM
PÆSTVM
VELIA
APREÆ INS.
THVRII
BRVTTII
KROTON
CONSENTIA
LOCRI
EPIZEPHYRII
ÆOLIÆ INSVLÆ
RHEGIVM
MESSANA
TYNDARIS
TAVROMENIVM
XII

REGIO IV
SABINI AND SAMNIUM

This region includes the bravest people in Italia, divided into numerous groups and under different names: the Frentani, the Marrucini, the Marsi, the Paeligni, the Sabini, the Samnites, and the Vestini. They descend from the great Sabelli, and among them the best known are surely the Sabini and the Samnites, after whom Regio IV is named. Specifically, Sabina is the innermost part, while Samnium includes anything between Sabina and the mare Adriaticum.

These tribes were the main obstacle to the expansion of Rome in Italia, as they lived closer to the Urbs, in a strategic position at the center of the peninsula, and were proud warriors. The great Sabini warriors, even in defeat, left Rome many of the religious and magic traditions tied to the local deities. One of them, the goddess Vacuna, dominates these lands still to this day, an elusive mistress of the earth and healing whom Imperial scholars have defined "of uncertain nature" (see page 98).

The Samnites were enemies of Rome for a long time, rightly feared, for they paired the skill in battle of their men with the prophetic gifts of their women. Still to this day, it is said that all Samnite women can read the future, and the local oracles are inspired more by Mars than Apollo. As such, divination experts have often found these places to be full of surprises. Rome fought the three Samnite wars against them, after which it effectively doubled the territories of its young Empire.

After the conquest, it was necessary to trace new roads to control this new region, so the Via Salaria was extended to the coast of Picenum (previously it stopped at Reate), and the new Via Caecilia was opened, connecting Rome to Hadria, on the mare Adriaticum. The region was already serviced by the Via Tiburtina, to which was later added the new section from Alba Fucens onwards, called Via Valeria. Presently the whole road is called Via Tiburtina-Valeria.

The other roads of the region, the Via Claudia Valeria and the Via Claudia Nova, came of the massive consolidation work of the lands of the Marsi, known all over the Empire for their ability to charm serpents and brew poisons. Such imposing works were willed by the Divine Claudius, who had the frequently-flooding lake Fucinum drained and provided new desperately-needed arable lands. However, the rivers were so strong that the whole process employed 30,000 men for 11 years. The opening of the drainage canal, dug into the rock for three miles, was memorable. The Emperor, to offer a truly spectacular celebration before opening the dams, offered a naumachia with triremes, quadriremes, and 19,000 men-at-arms. Claudius himself presided over the event, dressed in a lavish military cloak, and Augusta Agrippina in a gown of gold. The draining work was then completed by the Divine Hadrianus. In the area of Lake Fucinum rises the city of Alba, aptly called Fucens.

The cities of this bellicose region are neither large nor particularly wealthy, and live off of mostly shepherding and agriculture, but in its wildlands are said to live some strange birds, the Picae (see page 198), wandering at night among the huts of the shepherds, perfectly imitating the human voice. The locals claim the Picae are also capable of learning some of their names, tricking people out of the safety of their homes to make them got lost in the countryside.

THE *LORICA PECTORALIS*, SECRET LEGACY OF THE SAMNITE WARS

Roman victory over the Samnites came at the price of three wars, although all that blood bore many fruits. The first of which, understandably enough, was the conquest of strategically valuable land, the central and southern Appennines, key to any expansion in the Italic Peninsula. The second was the development of flexible battlefield tactics to better fight in harsh terrain. Among the many benefits brought by the contact with the Samnites was also an item so useful it was to be kept secret, the *Lorica Pectoralis*. This is a chest piece whose name in Greek is *kardiophylax*, "heart warden", derivative of a small plate for the chest designed to protect the heart that the Samnites used. Today, the Lorica Pectoralis is in widespread use among the agentes in rebus and those who must hide armor under civilian clothing. Even the Emperor wears one when he is among the crowds, carefully hidden under the toga and the Imperial cloak. It is said the Lorica Pectoralis of Theodomirus was made by the skilled Pythagoreans of Kroton with special materials, capable of protecting him not only from daggers, but also the projectiles of a manubalista.

Noteworthy towns are Histonium on the coast, and inland Teate, Amiternum, Corfinium, Alba Fucens, and Saepinum.

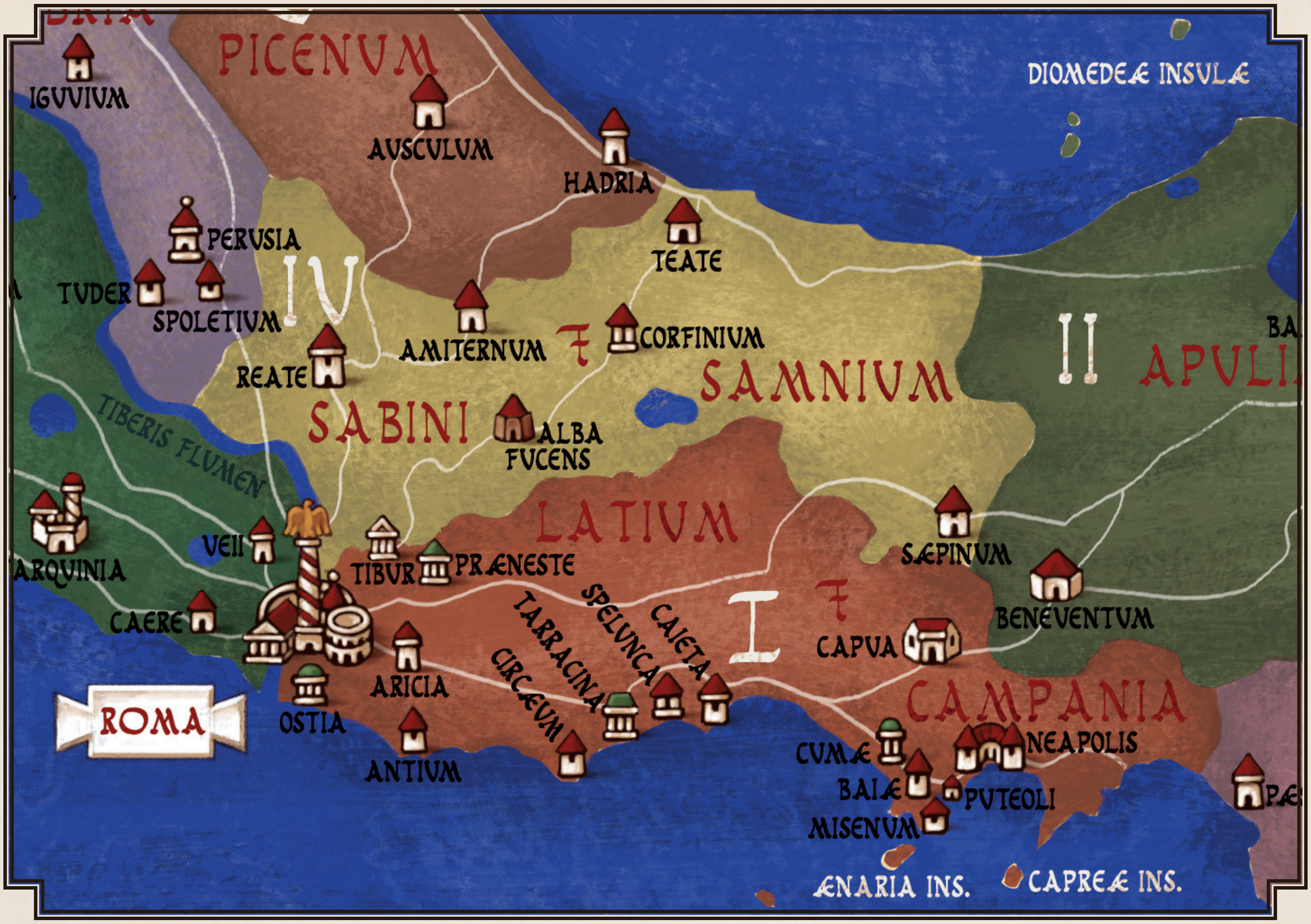
Reate. A city of the Sabini, it became Roman at a much later time, although the conversion of its citizenry was greatly helped by the sending of a great many colonists. Some local families then gained great importance, and I should point out that this was the homeland of M. Terentius Varrone, illustrious politician and historian of the age of Cicero, and of the Flavi, who gave three Emperors to the Urbs. Reate is also famous for its animals, especially a breed of donkeys of exceptional renown.

Teate. This was the only city of the Marrucini, always a loyal ally of Rome, and now a small, but relatively important town. Characteristic of the area of Teate is a really superb dining olive oil.

Amiternum. This is the only Sabina city of some importance other than Reate, and is named after the river Aternum, which passes through it, making the surrounding lands fertile and feeding the local aqueduct. Since during summer it does not hold as much water, the aqueduct is fitted with an imposing *castellum*, a reservoir of great size. The greatest source of local pride is the historian Sallust, born there in 667 AUC.

Corfinium. This was an important city in the past, located in strategic position in the land of the Sabelli and at the crossroads of numerous roads, the Via Tiburtina-Valeria from Rome among them. Such exceptional positioning determined the choice of the city as capital of the rebels during the Social War of 663 AUC, when the Italic allies of Rome (the socii) claimed with the strength of arms their right to Roman citizenship. Under such circumstances, the city took the name of *Italica*. Corfinium then played another strategic role during the civil war between the Divine Julius Caesar and Pompeius, as he attempted here to stop Caesar's advance southwards. Presently, it is a calm town, known only for a special all-women priesthood sworn to the worship of both Venus and Ceres.

Saepinum. The name of this city means "fenced place", and in fact it is entirely surrounded by wooden palisades. The city offers safety and shelter to passing herds, faithful to its name. All the animals passing by, whether privately-owned or part of Imperial property, are strictly controlled by magistrates and law enforcement, as it has happened in the past that herds or owners have hidden stolen head among their own, a scourge hard to eliminate in such a relatively peripheral area of the greater Imperial trade ecosystem.


PICENVM
IGUVIUM
AVSCVLVM
HADRIA
DIOMEDEÆ INSVLÆ
PERVSIA
TVDER
SPOLETIVM
IV
TEATE
AMITERNVM
CORFINIVM
REATE
SAMNIVM
II
APVLI
BA
SABINI
ALBA FVCENS
TIBERIS FLVMEN
LATIVM
VEII
ARQVINIA
TIBVR
PRÆNESTE
CAERE
TARRACINA
SPELVNCA
CAIETA
CIRCÆVM
SÆPINVM
BENEVENTVM
I
CAPVA
ROMA
OSTIA
ARICIA
ANTIVM
CAMPANIA
NEAPOLIS
CVMÆ
BAIÆ
PVTEOLI
MISENVM
PÆ
ÆNARIA INS.
CAPREÆ INS.

ALBA FUCENS, IMPREGNABLE CITY-FORTRESS

Although likely founded by the Aequi, Alba Fucens stands right in the heart of the harsh land of the Marsi and owes its name to the nearby Lake Fucinum. At the base of Mount Velinus, although at an altitude worthy of a mountain, it has always had mighty walls, standing on a strategic position from which it not only dominates central Italia, but also the Via Tiburtina-Valeria, which connects it directly to the Urbs.

From here, one has direct control over the land of the Marsi, fearsome warriors who lived in the mountains of the Samnium. It is believed that the Marsi still to this day hold the great power of charming snakes with a magic song that bends them to their will. Some even claim they can turn into these animals, although this has never been demonstrated (see page 117).

For all of these reasons, Rome, when it conquered Alba Fucens in 550 AUC, moved into the city more than six thousand citizens to ensure the loyalty of its inhabitants. Therefore, the city stayed loyal to Rome during the wars against both the Etruscans and the Gauls, and the Punic Wars. In time, numerous legions were garrisoned in the city, greatly contributing to its growth. In a short time, the soldiers moved their families and slaves in, and Alba Fucens reached fifty thousand inhabitants, at a time in which the Urbs had not much more than three times that. The city became an impregnable fortress, so much so that it was also used as a “state prison” for those too important and yet too dangerous. In 550 AUC, Syphax, king of the Numidians and ally of Hannibal, was locked up there. In 585, Perseus, last king of Macedonia, died there. In 632, Bituitus, king of the Arverni Gauls, was moved there from Gallia Narbonensis. Even today, Alba Fucens keeps the rustic look of a military settlement because of its mighty walls and numerous barracks, but many amenities make life more comfortable: an amphitheater, a theater, numerous thermae, and a market where one can find anything, almost like in Rome. Around it have risen numerous beautiful villas belonging to politicians who love the local safety and the distance from the intrigue of the Urbs. Among them, noteworthy is Valerius Fertius Aquilifer, now a senator after a military career that saw him a general and then praefectus praetorio.

REGIO V
PICENUM

The fifth region exclusively includes the land that once belonged to the Piceni, densely populated in the past. In fact, the Piceni who surrendered to our armies were 360,000. The land is serviced mostly by the Via Salaria, which links it directly with the Urbs, and a comfortable coastal road that joins all the cities.

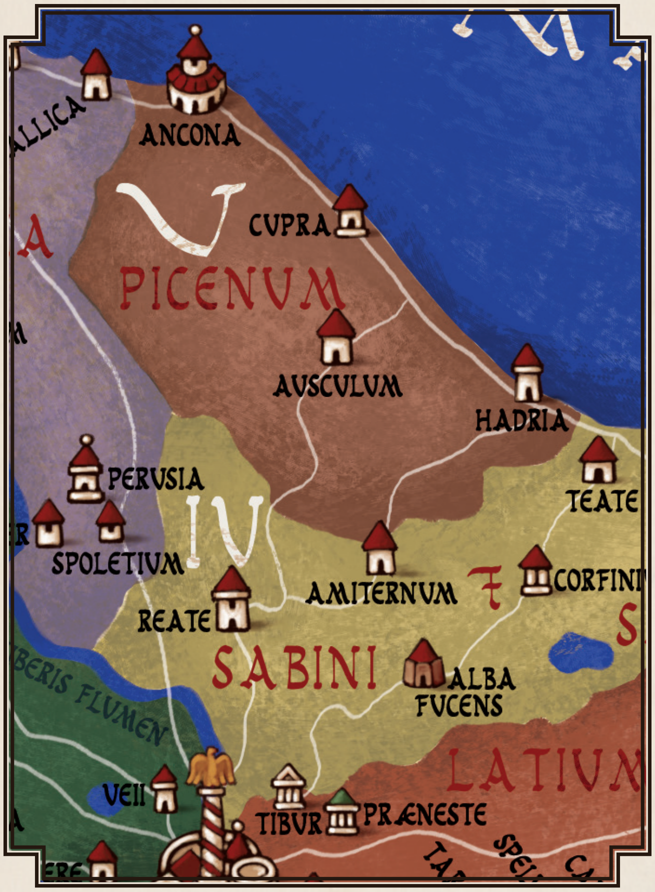
The main cities all rise on the Adriatic side, while inland are particularly diffused small factories. Production is then mostly growing wheat, grapes, and olives. There are also numerous craftsmen corporations, and because it is a region with a strong sailing tradition, I should mention the *fabri navales* (shipwrights, that is), the dendrophori and the *tignuarii* (respectively, woodsmen and woodworkers), and the *navicularii* (shipowners).

Ancona. From the border with the coast of Regio VI, first is the Greek city of Ancona, founded by the Siracusans as a trade port. Its name is a reminder of the pleasant disposition of its harbor, ankon, meaning “elbow” in Greek, which was enhanced by the Divine Trajan with a great artificial pier, at the beginning of which stands a great marble arch, raised in celebration of such a generous deed. Production of purple tincture has prospered here since time immemorial.

Cupra. This town is known mostly for the shrine of a beloved local deity, the goddess Cupra, whom the town was named after (see page 99).

Hadria. Down south is the town of Hadria, rising on a hill a few miles from the sea. It does not hold particular importance, but it should be mentioned it is the homeland of the family that gave us our beloved Emperor Hadrianus.

Ausculum. Inland is Ausculum, rising on a nail-shaped hill, surrounded by rivers on three sides, making this town hard to access. Being a mandatory stop for those traveling along the Salaria headed to the coast, it is a lively little town.



REGIO VI
UMBRIA

The sixth region includes Umbria proper and part of the land of the Gauls this side of Ariminum. The Umbrii are held to be the most ancient tribe in Italia, whom Plinius the Elder called "people of the storm". According to the legends, in fact, they were the only survivors of the primordial flood the gods sent onto the earth. Since the Greek word *ombros* means "rain", it seems that the Umbrii were named right after this prodigious event. Proud of such an origin, even to this day the inhabitants of this region maintain their own rites, held by priests called *kvestur*.

This region in the heart of the peninsula is mostly mountains, covered in woodlands and rich in lakes. It is famous for its milk, for the great grapes of Spoletium and Tuder, for breeding white oxen, and for wool.
The only great artery that crosses it through is the Via Flaminia. In the southwestern reaches of the region are frequent otium villas, surrounded by large holdings that are still not latifundia. One of the best known is the one that belonged to Plinius the Younger. In the same area are located the clay quarries that have determined the rise of large brick industries. The presence of numerous healing springs and the gentle climate make staying in this green region quite pleasant. Here are rumored to be springs with miraculous properties, and many are the towns claiming the honor of having some, although it is difficult to tell fact from fiction and understand which are the springs with magical properties.
The main cities of the coast are Pisaurum, Fanum Fortunae, and Sena Gallica.

Pisaurum. The city that stands on the eponymous river also features a small port on the Adriatic coast. Pisaurum is considered by all a rich and lively town.

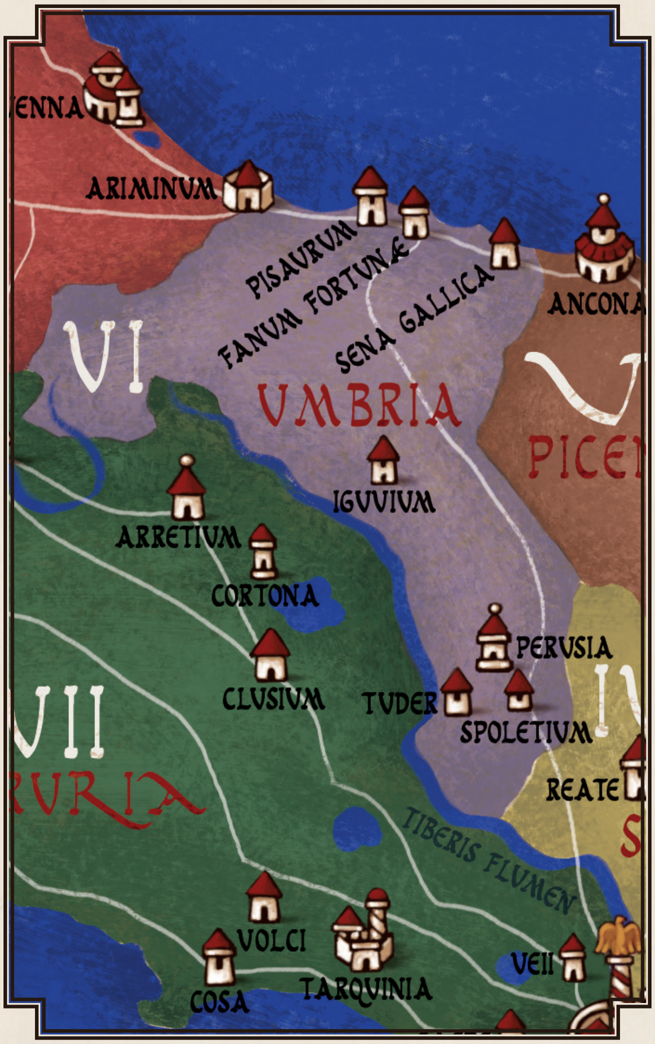
Fanum Fortunae. This settlement owes its name to an ancient and still much-attended shrine (*fanum*) of Fortuna. Fanum Fortunae gained importance with the birth of the Via Flaminia, ending here and serving as its cardus maximus. Its buildings are beautiful, and I have to point out the basilica built by famous architect Vitruvius, and by him mentioned as the ideal prototype of this sort of edifice in his *De Architectura*.

Sena Gallica, Close by, south of Fanum, this city was once inhabited by a group of Senones, then one of the first Roman colonies on the Hadriaticum.

Inland, Tuder, Iguvium, and Spoletium are the cities worthy of notice.

THE MYSTERIOUS INSCRIPTIONS OF THE ANCIENT PICENI

Crossing this region would be something relatively unremarkable, if it were not for the frequency of the stones carved in a language that nobody has been able to decipher to this day. Perhaps they are sacred inscriptions, although on this the scholars of the Pontifices do not agree, and to which deity they are dedicated, and what they ask of them, is not yet understood. The alphabet is Etruscan, but the ancient language of the Piceni is still unknown, forgotten, the Piceni themselves claim. It is unlikely, however, that this is so, because new inscriptions seem to appear at a certain frequency. Somebody, then, is still in possession of that ancient knowledge. As we wait for the scholars to clear up the mystery, it is better not to touch or, worse, damage those stones.



A PORT IN THE WOODLANDS OF ITALIA

Right in the green heart of Italia must be mentioned the unexpected presence of a trade port of considerable size, the port-canal of the town of Mevania. Mevania stands on a small hill between Spoletium and Perusia, and is well-serviced by the roads of the region, with the Via Flaminia making for its decumanus and crossing through it. So, one could comfortably move from Rome to Mevania thanks just to this road, but not only so. A thick network of rivers surrounds the town; the main one being the Timia, which feeds into the Clasius, which in turn flows into the Tiberis. For time immemorial, then, it has been possible to travel by water between Rome and the heart of Umbria. Due to happenstance, the Tinia forms a natural bend adjacent to the Via Flaminia in correspondence to the Mevania hill, making it so that the waters of the river pooled there and enlarged it. The only logical thing was, then, to turn it into a fluvial port that today services not just the surroundings, but also Etruria, much to the benefit of trade and communications.

Tuder. The name of this city is of Etruscan origin, and is a reminder of its location on the border between the lands of the Etruscans and the Umbrii, as *tutere* in the Etruscan language meant "border". It stands in a fertile region famous for its grapes and wine, known as tudernis grapes. The fertility of the area attracted rustic villas, often belonging to important characters of Roman political life, such as the famous lawyer P. Claudius Alesius, also known for loving the life of the country gentleman and making fine olive oil. Like such illustrious citizens, however, people of lesser virtues, too, come to this region to enjoy the fruits of their machinations, avoiding scandals that in the long run could happen if they kept meddling in the public life of the Capital. Tuder, then, is prosperous, and in spite of its small size it boasts a theater and am amphitheater.

Iguvium. This was a city-state of great importance for the ancient Umbrii, once guiding them in their religious practices before becoming a great supporter of the Divine Julius. Close by is a temple dedicated to Jupiter Penninus or Appenninus, seat of a renowned oracle. The *sortes Penninae* were consulted even by some of our Emperors in moments of uncertainty. Here is made a greatly appreciated herbal oil said to have healing properties (see page 90). Unfortunately, the lands around Iguvium are plagued by thick mists and wolves that grow particularly dangerous with the full moon (see page 105).

Spoletium. A small city close to a sacred grove, it produces a renowned wine, sometimes compared to the Falernian wine for its excellent quality.

REGIO VII
ETRURIA

This is a very ancient region, rich in history and mother of illustrious people, to whom Rome itself owes much. The noble Etruscans have been our enemies for a long time, but the initial hostility turned into a strong, mutual bond, and great are the gifts the Etruscan civilization has given to ours.

Etruscan are the twelve Lictores who escort the consuls, the ivory thrones on which they sit, called *curul seat*, the triumph ceremony for victorious generals, and the purple-hemmed robes, symbol of senatorial rank.

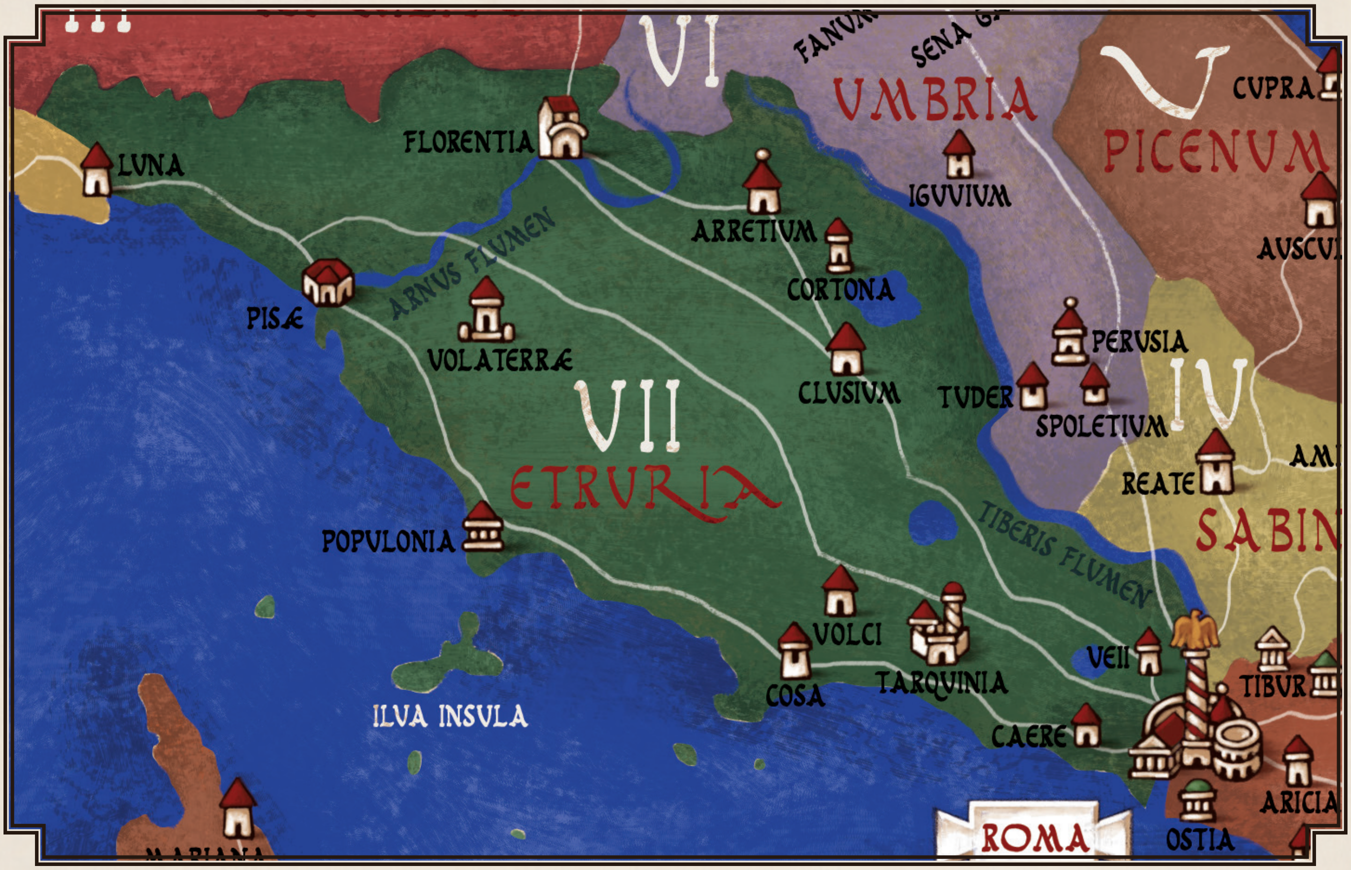
The Etruscans knew many powerful magics, such as the secret to calling lightning, and it is said that our King Tullius Hostilius died, struck by one such bolt, when he attempted to use this practice on his own, without proper training. Centuries later, the Etruscan King Porsenna used it to great effect to destroy a terrible monster attacking the city of Bolsena, after devastating its countryside. With the disappearance of the Etruscan civilization, this lore was lost, like the secrets of all their spells, although they still have left us the arts of interpreting the supernatural signs; the *ars fulguratoria*, the *haruspicina*, and the *auspicium*.

The cities of Etruria, once numerous and powerful, do not keep any signs of their ancient splendor, their people either dead or moved elsewhere. Only the northern cities, like Clusium and Arretium, in this Regio, and Bononia and Spina, now in Regio VIII, show continuity, although by now they have been heavily Romanized. Gone also is the language spoken by the Etruscans, nor there is anybody left who can understand their writing. It is said that in the most remote reaches of the region there are still some old farmers who speak the old Etruscan dialect, although the rumor is not yet confirmed. Surely this land exudes magic and mystery, and perhaps it should be garrisoned with a permanent unit from the Cohors Auxiliaria Arcana.

Etruria is crossed by numerous roads. The Via Aurelia runs along its coast up to Genua, in Liguria. The Via Clodia crosses the inner lands on the Rome-Saturnia axis. The Via Cassia joins Rome to Arretium, Finally, the Via Flaminia Minor completes its connection to the Etruscan-Padus area, joining Arretium to Bononia.

On the coast, from the north, are the cities of Luna, Pisae, Populonia, and Cosa.

Luna. This city owes its name to the shape of its harbor. At first, it was a military outpost to keep the Ligures under watch, and it lived mostly on agriculture. It enjoyed particular prosperity under



ILLEGAL TRADE OF ETRUSCAN FUNERARY ITEMS

Anything connected to the Etruscan tradition has a great appeal to any social class. In Etruria, still to this day are made "traditional" items, like bucchero pottery or their jewelry decorated with the "granulation" technique, which are exported everywhere and make for one of the safest sources of income for any trader or craftsman of Regio VII. It is a legitimate fashion, although somewhat silly, which makes for honest trade.

Etruscan civilization, on the other hand, has always been commonly associated with magic. Such an opinion is strongly rooted not only in the illiterate masses, but all strata of society. With illegal results, sometimes:

- **Production and trafficking of modern items sold as Etruscan relics.** This is widespread, especially in Etruria, but also in those areas that can boast an ancient Etruscan presence. It is an illegal, although not sacrilegious, practice that falls in the category of scams and cons. Wildly different items (vases, swords, statuettes) or precious jewels (rings, pendants, banquet crowns, brooches) carved with "magical formulas" in pseudo-Etruscan characters enjoy a florid market all over the province, are often made in Etruria. The ones that are made mimicking the ancient style are then adequately weathered, to make them look they came from burial grounds. As such, there are counterfeiters so skilled that their work is barely distinguishable from authentic pieces.
- **Trafficking of items stolen from Etruscan tombs.** This practice, too, is as illegal as it is widespread, made even worse by its sacrilegious nature. There is also a category of "specialist" tomb robbers, capable of tracing the most ancient and still-closed Etruscan tombs to loot them. Such trade is fed by the higher classes for two reasons. First, the tombs contain items of actual worth, made of precious materials, greatly expensive, even if not magical. Second, because the hardship in finding and moving them makes the job of the robber all the harder and more lucrative. Tomb robbing is punishable by death, and so it is inevitable that the seller charges enormous amounts for those pieces to justify the risk.

the rule of the Divine Augustus, who, as he was fond of saying, inherited a Rome made of bricks and left it a city of marble. The city is just a few miles from the famous marble caves, opened and promoted by our first Emperor, which provide the majority of the marble used in the whole province. Its workers are for the most part slaves or liberti, but a great portion of the cave is now direct Imperial property.

Pisae. A small port of most ancient foundation, perhaps it is the most elusive and mysterious Etruscan city, its true origin still unknown. Its Etruscan origin has been questioned multiple times by scholars, the Greek Aristotle among them, who claimed it was of Ligurian descent.

Populonia. This was the only ancient Etruscan metropolis to overlook the sea, and today it is an industrial center of great importance, because of the seemingly endless iron veins of the isle of Ilva, just 10 miles off the coast. However, nothing of its ancient splendor is left, the site now being occupied only by slaves and iron workers.

Cosa. Famous for its mighty citadel with turreted walls, its inner city is very elegant, with beautiful public buildings, such as the majestic capitolium on its highest terrace and the relative platform for the auspices. At the foot of the citadel is the port, built in a natural cleft of the rocky hill, and in the lagoon behind is an emporium, connected to the fish farms and shops for working the fish.

Volaterrae. Inland, halfway between Pisae and Populonia, is the city of Volterrae, dominating the waving hills from a relative height, its original purpose to watch over the valleys of its rivers. The Volaterran aristocracy is one of the few that survived, almost unscathed, centuries of decadence, the war between Marius and Silla, and the civil strife, and still to this day plays a prominent role in the Empire. Many of our most illustrious Haruspices are from the noble families Volaterrae, particular the gens Caecina, which gave even some consuls to the Empire.

Florentia. Close by to the north is Florentia, a city of most ancient origin, but limited political and commercial importance. However, its central location may become key to the control of Etruria and its traffics with the rest of the Italia, leading to frequent talks of elevating it to the rank of regional capital.

Arretium. This city is unusual for its buildings, lavishly decorated with terracotta instead of marble or colored stone, a unique sight in the Empire. Its coralline ceramics are exported all over the world, and have made their way even into the remote Indies. Arretium's *arretina vasa* workshops employ at times more than 60 slaves, and around them have grown enormous interest groups, involving the most important families of the city. The rich and welcoming Arretium is unfortunately plagued, every now and then, by a horrid monstrous creature, a ferocious Chimera that dwells who-knows-where in the nearby Appennines. Thank the gods, its attacks are rare, the last one being more than a century ago.

Clusium. The hub between northern and southern Etruria, in ancient times it ruled over a most vast territory. It was one of the most fearsome enemies of Rome during the rule of the legendary King Porsenna, whose tomb is highly sought-after for the mythic treasure it is said to contain. Typical of Clusium are the stone ash urns, especially those made of veined alabaster or local stones; their quality is great, but they are used only by the locals, as the rest of the Empire prefers sarcophagi.

Southward to the border with Latium, I must mention Tarquinia, Caere, Volci, and Veii.

Tarquinia. The story of Tarquinia, Etruscan Tarchna, is tightly connected to that of the very Etruscan people, as they claim the city was founded by the mythical Tarchet himself, inventor of the ritual of *Haruspicina*. Tarquinia led the Etruscan league that gave our ancestors so much trouble and was the homeland of the Tarquinii royal dynasty that ruled Rome in the last days of its monarchy. Here, too, is a core of ancient noble families, gens Spurinna being the best known of them, which provided Aruspices to the Divine Julius. It was a Spurinna who warned him against the Ides of March, and now this name is often on the lists of our consuls. The noble and ancient blood of this people, however, sometimes breeds a haughty attitude. All in Rome know the shameful behavior of the noblewoman Tanaquilla Caesennia, who refused to bow at the appearance of our lord Theodomirus, as, she said, when her ancestors ruled over Rome, the Emperor's barely ruled the herds in the Tiberis valley. In Tarquinia are based the *LX Aruspices*, numbering some of the most skilled Aruspices of the Empire (see page 131).

Caere. This was the most elegant and Hellenic city of ancient Tyrrhenii, and it traded with the Phoenicians for a long time, too. Its trade policy led to an alliance with the Carthaginians, to keep the Greeks on the western markets in check. Then, it became our ally, and its refined society had so much influence on the then-modest Urbs that our nobles were sent there for their schooling. It is, then, sad to witness its decline and realize that the city magistrates are all lowborn. The local area is also known to cause malaria, so its people tend to gather in the healthier lands on the hills. So dies one of the capitals of Etruria.

Volci. Almost deserted, here one can find only some skilled bronze sculptors, heirs of an ancient and noble tradition.

Veii. Finally, almost in Roman land, is Veii, in a strategic position for the control of the outer course of the Tiberis. For this reason, the city has always been our bitter enemy, until its definitive conquest by Camillus in 357 AUC. It was also a religious center of great relevance, because of an oracle of Minerva attended by the aristocrats of the whole of Etruria. The city has also given birth to the great sculptor Vulca, who made the terracotta statue for the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus on Capitoline Hill. The tradition of terracotta statues continues to this day, but the more elaborate modern taste prefers the use of marble and has caused this traditional style to decline. The great expansion of the Urbs, from which Veii is now separated only by the course of the Tiberis and a narrow strip of countryside, attracts much of the surrounding people, and so this ancient city is slowly depopulating.

In southern Etruria, around the Ciminus Lacus, is the thick **Ciminia Silva**, a grove so grim, dire, and full of mysterious dangers that even our legions refuse to cross it, preferring instead to take the long route around it. What horrible things hide there we cannot know, but it is sure that those who set foot are never seen again, as well as those willing to delve into the thick of that cursed vegetation looking for them.

CIMINIA SILVA – ENCOUNTERS TABLE

Roll 1d10 when appropriate. These encounters can happen both during the day and the night.

D10 Roll	Event
1-3	**Trees, trees everywhere.** The woods are dark and unsettling, and occasionally the animals seem to fall silent for long minutes. Nothing unusual seems to happen on the way… what way? A **De Natura** roll (DT 9) is required to find one's way out of the woods, which can be repeated for every hour of aimless wandering. With consecutive failures, the roll is automatically considered a 9.
4-6	**An insidious path**. After trudging for a few hours in the thick underbrush, the Custodes find a path, marked by circular smooth stones, that seems to emerge all of a sudden from the jumble of roots and fallen leaves. As long as the Custodes follow the path, they arrive nowhere and keep delving into the woods without meeting a living soul (and without rolling on this table). If they abandon the path, their next roll gains a +2 bonus.
7	**The processional of madmen.** Abandoning the safety of the margins of the woods, the Custodes suddenly hear a noise similar to that made by a pack of animals barging through the tops of the trees! It is a group of deranged men and women who, charmed by the forest, now live without setting foot on the ground and move from one branch to another. The group of madmen attacks, throwing a hail of sharp branches and various detritus that deals 1d3 points of damage each tempus (reduced by armor, as usual). Their fury can be stopped only by an imperious oratory (**Auctoritas** or **De Societate** roll, DT 9) to draw the attention of their leader, a former centurion of venerable age who now calls himself *dux arboricolus*. He has risen to the defense of the forest in the name of Imperial Rome and is endowed with surprising agility. Showing the diplomi of the Cohors Arcana is enough to impress them. The *dux* then gives quick dispositions, so the Custodes are safely escorted outside of the Silva.
8	**The aqueducts of the Suburra do it better.** The Custodes arrive at a river surrounded by dead animals and a human corpse, a few weeks old. The river was poisoned by a Basilisk (see Core Rulebook), and if the characters walk its waters against the flow to investigate, they reach a smoking cavern where the terrible creature hides.
9	**Veils in the dark.** Among the shady branches of the Silva, the Custodes see the faint movement of light robes. It is a young girl, armed with a spear and with two small wings, scantily dressed and apparently distractedly hunting. She is Sitmica, one of the Lasa (see page 128), who fades into the foliage as soon as she sees the Custodes. If the characters attempt to stop her, or worse, follow her, the nymph turns one of them into a snake to get away.
10	**The lazy daimon.** The Custodes arrive at a clearing occupied by a lake, its calm surface reflecting the moon. Beside the lake lays a man with his back leaning on a natural pillar of smooth stone, leaning over the dark water. The man is unusually handsome and is playing a complex but melodic ballad on a lyre. If approached, the man reveals he is a greater *daimon* (see Core Rulebook), sent by Apollo to recover a crown the god has lost under the moon. However, he was charmed by the beauty of the mortal lands and prefers to lazily take in their beauty instead of doing his master's bidding. The characters will do it for him, now. If met with refusal, the creature takes a threatening and rather convincing tone. If the Custodes accept the task, the lazy daimon tells the group to climb on the pillar (**De Corpore** roll, DT 6) to take a look at the surface of the lake from the point where the moon reflects on it. The character who follows his instructions realizes that from that elevated position they can see the borders of the Silva, surrounding the lake like a laurel crown; if they extend their hand in the middle of the silvery moon reflection, the Custos grasps as if by magic a woven crown, which the daimon then takes into custody. The divine creature disappears, and the characters fall into a deep slumber. At dawn, the Ciminia Silva (see page 41) is not there anymore, and with it its curse and mysteries. The Demiurge can count the Custodes as having performed a memorable De Magia action (see page 128 of the Core Rulebook).

REGIO VIII
AEMILIA

This region mostly coincides with ancient Gallia Cispadana. It is defined to the north by the Padus River, to the east by the Mare Adriaticus, and to the south and west by the Apennine Mountains.

A key region, in ancient times it divided Roman Italia proper to the south from the Celtic plains to the north. The ancient border is represented by the great River Padus, which flows magnificently along the whole region. The Padus itself is a threat to travelers, for famous are its wrathful bouts that flood and overwhelm homes, roads, and villages. Many even believe that the thick fog rising from the river has a supernatural origin, as it is said that in its course lives the Monstrum Brumale (also called Megalassus or Magalassos by the locals, see page 204), a horrid beast that emanates grayish miasmas that the eyes cannot pierce. Because of this, its appearance is unknown. According to the local rumors, the monster hides at night, close to the roads, and breathes its fumes to draw travelers off the beaten path and devour them. Others instead ascribe the vapors to the remains of the chariot of the Sun God that cursed Phaethon wanted to drive, crashing it into the river. To this legend is also tied that of the amber of the Padus. It is said, in fact, that when Phaethon died he was mourned by his sisters, divine daughters of the Sun God. Their tears turned into magical drops of amber that to this day are still scattered around the course of the river (see sidebar).

The northern border of the region, following the vast course of the river, faces a great arch of lagoons and mires that extend southward and parallel to the coast well beyond the city of Ravenna.

The southwestern side of the region, although with steep mountains, can still be accessed longitudinally, allowing easy communication among the Padan Plain and south-central Italia. Harder, however, is communication between the individual valleys.

The main artery of this region is the wonderful Via Aemilia, a continuation of the Via Flaminia, opened in 566 AUC by Consul M. Aemilius Lepidus. It connects numerous important settlements in an impressive straight line from Ariminum to Placentia; Caesena, Forum Livi, Bonomia, Mutina, Regium Lepidum, and Parma.

Another artery of great importance is the Via Popilia, which joints Ariminum and Ravenna and heads into Aquileia, running parallel to the coast.

The Adriatic coast does not have any proper ports, but vessels still take shelter in its lagoons. Following the course of the Padus up to Augusta Taurinorum allows moving wares from the eastern markets, even to the western-most reaches of the Italia province.

THE AMBER OF THE PADUS

The Amber of the Padus is very different from that from the northern lands of the Fenni. It does not have its characteristic golden hue and the transparency that sometimes allows seeing insects trapped inside. The Amber of the Padus is denser and thicker, and presents a certain variety of colors. However, it is more precious, the locals claim, as it possesses fire magical properties, depending on the shade of color.

Its connection to fire is born of the legend of Phaethon, the unfortunate son of the Sun God (see page 14). When he died crashing the sun chariot into the bed of the Padus, his sisters, Merope, Aegiale, Helia, Lampetia, Phoebe, Aetheria, and Dioxippe, desperately mourned him. Jupiter took pity on their pain and turned them into trees, their tears turning into drops of resin that then became amber.

According to folklore, the Amber of the Padus protects from lightning flashes and fire, and it is said that Emperor Nero had an "amber chamber" made in his magnificent Domus Aurea, in which to take refuge in case of fires.

To the Padus Amber are ascribed so many marvelous effects that it is complicated to make sure whether they are all true, false, or both. Among other things, it is said to cure fevers, keep demons at bay, and turn normal swords into weapons of fire.

In this region are two main areas: the Adriatic, whose most important centers are Ariminum, Ravenna, and Spina, and the Padus, with Bononia, Mutina, Parma, Regium Popili, and Placentia.

Ravenna. This wonderful city, rightfully called *Felix*, "lucky", rises in swamp land. However, thanks to a mighty drainage and land reclamation effort completed by the Divine Augustus, it is accessible by a network of navigable canals, the main of which is the Fossa Augusta Ravennatis, which connects the port of Ravenna to the Padus. Moving upstream, one can access the interconnected inner lagoons that lead to Aquileia, an important road junction to the north, the east, and the frontiers.

Ravenna has an unusual look to it, as it is ridden with inner canals jointed by as many bridges, and its inhabitants move about not on wagons or palanquins, but small boats. The port of the city is slightly outside, in an extremely safe position inside the lagoon. Ravenna's strategic positioning and the political and

THE PAEFECTUS CLASSIS OF RAVENNA

Caius Duilius Valens
Value: DV8
1 die: Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Corpore, De Societate (Command), Hit Points, Ratio
3 dice: De Bello, De Natura (Navigation)
Hit Points: 16
Weapons: Gladius (Damage 6)
Protections: Lorica Plumata (Protection 6), when not embarked

Large and muscular, this imposing man of the sea began his meteoric rise when, still a boy, he dove into the waves to save Emperor Theodomirus's trained monkey, who had fallen overboard during the Imperial visit to Classis near Ravenna. The Emperor, struck by the gesture, elevated this young fisherman of obscure origin to the rank of Eques, knight. So, Caius Duilius began his brilliant and swift military career, gaining much distinction as a ship captain in the war against the ferocious pirates of the Dalmatian coast. Over the course of a daring boarding action, he personally killed more than thirty pirates and captured their leader, who was later sent to Rome in chains. It was again the Emperor who promoted him, after which he climbed the fleet hierarchy within a short time.
Now he spends the majority of his time in the Classis port, chafing, as he wishes to return to the sea on his *liburna* and keep fighting. In the meantime, he has wiped out with unusual vigor and inflexible harshness a coven of corruption and dark dealings tied to the fleet's quartermasters. He often spends his free time cruising the Adriaticus on a small private ship, accompanied only by his faithful attendant and a few of his military friends.

commercial importance of its port were key factors in determining the decision of the Divine Augustus to establish here the seat of the Imperial fleet for the eastern seas, where it still is, under the command of the Praefectus Classis Caius Duilius Valens.

The presence of the Imperial fleet has given the port of Ravenna its present name, Classis.

THE FERRATI, MUTINA'S RACING HORSES

In the rolling plains around Mutina are bred special racing horses, the *Ferrati*, who owe their name to the metal soles with which their hooves are fitted. It seems this practice came from deep within Germanic lands, for work horses, and only here is applied to racing, too. The Ferrati are incredibly fast if mounted by a skilled rider, or when pulling a racing chariot, biga, or quadriga. Their shoes, however, are not the only reason behind their speed. They are the result of a long breeding process that has resulted in a special race of black horses, their mantles shining as if made of burnished metal, their limbs thin and fast, and their heads small. Given their extremely high value, around 100,000 sestertii each, it is rare for a racing chariot to be pulled entirely by Ferrati. In the quadriga, only the outer horses, the ones hitched to the central horses instead of the chariot proper, are Ferrati. They are more independent, lead the others, and can impose their pace on the rest of the pull. In case of a biga, the Ferratus takes the left spot so it can better deal with the curves of the racing track. Although easy to recognize in a mixed pull, their owners love to flaunt their wealth by tying a red drape on their horses' backs, and so the black rearing horse woven onto a red background has become the unofficial flag that, in the region, marks the breeders of this race. Given the value of these animals, their farms look more like military settlements, watched over by armed personnel.

Spina. This gracious city has kept to this day a strong Etruscan presence in its population in testament to its origins, and acts as the intermediary between the northern regions of the Empire and the areas of greater Greek influence. Noteworthy are its production of bronze items of Etruscan inspiration and its ceramics.

Ariminum. A settlement vital for the Italic road network since ancient times, it has acted as a bulwark against the Gauls pressing from the north, then turning from fortress city into a powerful trade hub. It is also tied to the foundations of our history, as here the Divine Julius Caesar addressed his troops, saying the fateful sentence, *"Alea iacta est"*, the die is cast (see page 110). Today, it is a vibrant city, famous for its vivid social life, and the luxurious and ancient villas of the republic age, now side by side with the modern buildings built by the august predecessors of our lord Theodomirus, rich in colored marble. Famous are the marble Arch of Augustus, both the city gates and the end of the Via Flaminia, and the grand amphitheater, while the more refined cultural life finds its worthy frame in the city's lovely theater.

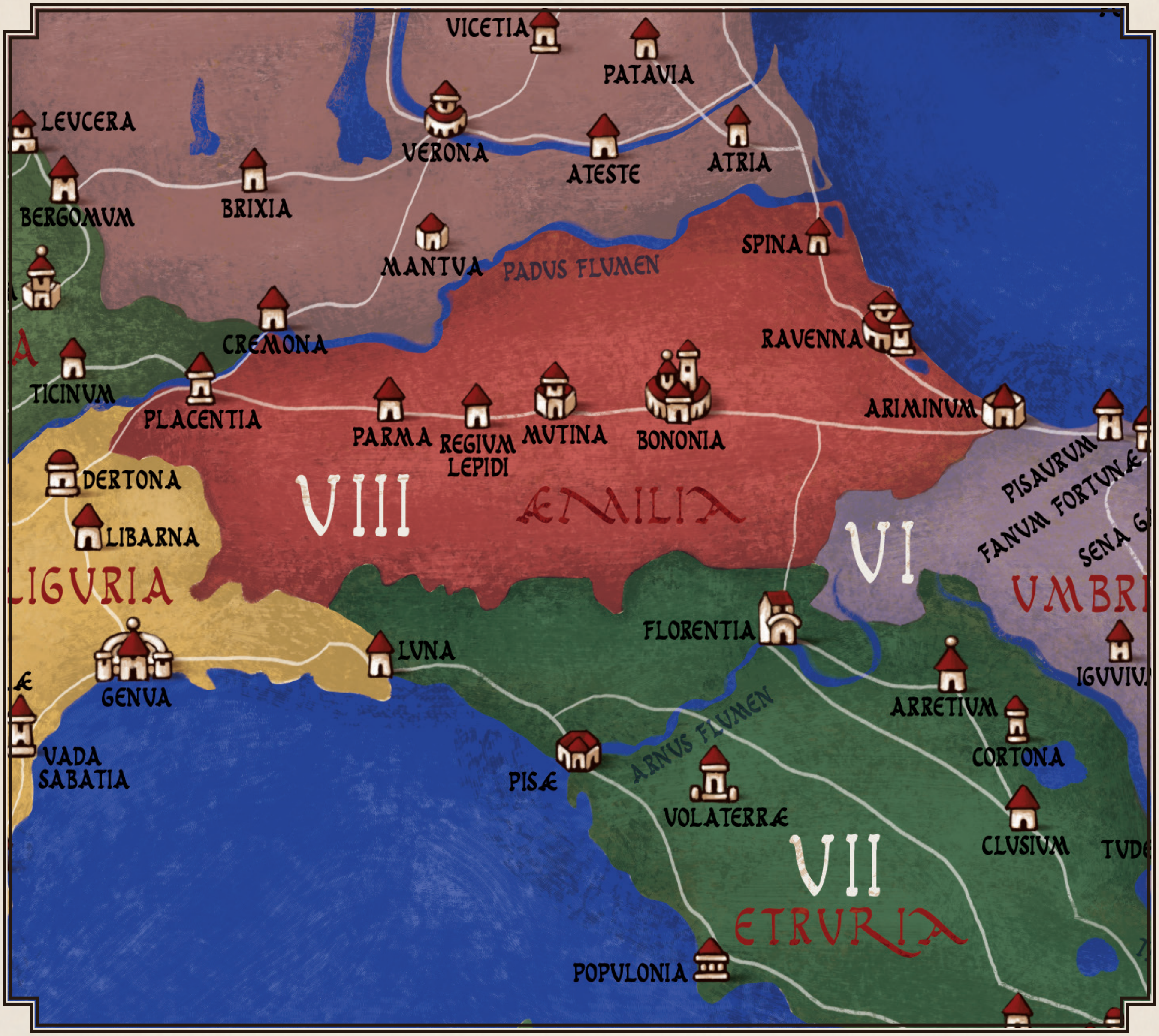
Bononia. Wealthy Bononia, founded by the Etruscans as Felsina, is built with the Via Aemilia as its decumanus maximus. Its roads have always been under constant maintenance, including the characteristic porches lining its main streets. Rightfully famous is, also, the underground aqueduct that extends for roughly 25 miles. A peculiar dish of its local cuisine is known even in faraway lands, the famous *lagane* (or lasagne) with minced meat sauce.

Mutina. An ancient city, founded as a Roman outpost in Gaul well before the Via Aemilia was opened, its commercial life is vibrant, and its Forum, with the statues of the predecessors of our Augusts, attracts numerous tourists. Typical of the city is the extremely fine wool, which the geographer Strabo defined the best in Italia, and a special breed of racing horses (see sidebar).

Regium Lepidi. Grown as a trade hub along the Via Aemilia, this town had its moment of greatest prosperity in the IX Century AUC. Presently, however, it endures an economic crisis, and its southeastern part is slowly depopulating.

Parma. Of Gallic origin, this city is making a name for itself in the economy of the region for its swine farms.

Placentia. The beautiful, valiant bulwark from whence Hannibal descended into Italia, it is now a renowned road junction in the region, thanks to its fluvial port.


VICETIA
PATAVIA
LEVCERA
VERONA
ATESTE
ATRIA
BERGOMVM
BRIXIA
SPINA
MANTVA
PADVS FLVMEN
RAVENNA
CREMONA
TICINVM
PLACENTIA
ARIMINVM
PARMA
REGIVM LEPIDI
MVTINA
BONONIA
DERTONA
VIII
ÆMILIA
LIBARNA
PISAVRVM
FANVM FORTVNÆ
SENA G
VI
LIGVRIA
VMBRI
FLORENTIA
LVNA
GENVA
IGVVIV
ARRETIVM
ARNVS FLVMEN
CORTONA
VADA SABATIA
PISÆ
VOLATERRÆ
VII
CLVSIVM
TVD
ETRVRIA
POPVLONIA

REGIO IX
LIGURIA

This is a region made up of two distinct territories, split length-wise by the Apennine Mountains. To their south are mostly maritime cities such as Albintimilium, Albingaunum, Vada Sabatia, and Genua, while between the mountains and the Padus on the gentle inner hills rise Dertona, Aquae Statiellae, Hasta, and Alba Pompeia.

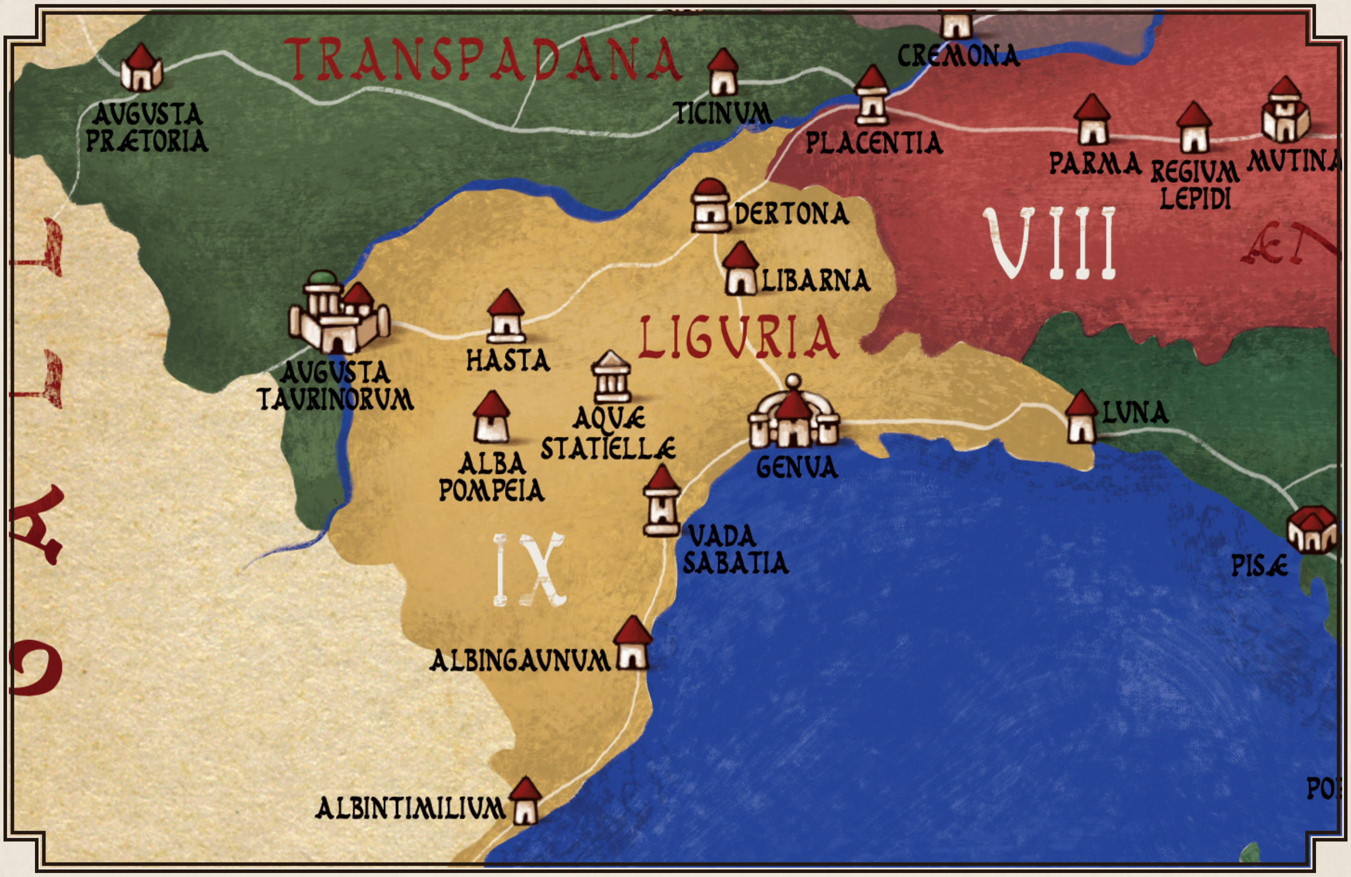
A strategically key area for communication with Gallia Narbonensis, Liguria is densely serviced by public roads, with the Via Julia Augusta running along the coast from Nicaea to Vada Sabatia. There, it joins the Via Aurelia which, following the whole Tyrrhenian coast, reaches Rome. A branch of the Aurelia, the Via Aemilia Scauri, connects Vada Sabatia to Dertona. From Dertona, an important road hub, the Via Fulvia leads to Augusta Taurinorum in Regio XI. Dertona is also connected to the coast by the Via Postumia, which ends in Genua.

This region is named after its ancient inhabitants, the Liguri, whom tradition claims to be among the most ancient peoples in the Mediterranean. In fact, Hesiod counts them among the three primordial tribes: the Ligures to the west, the Scythians to the east, and the Ethiopians in Africa. Still to this day, their customs and traditions are different from all others; they are not divided into social classes, women perform the same tasks as men, and they all keep their hair long.

Although a great many roads cross their lands, it is rare to meet the locals, who prefer to take mountain paths known only to them. The Ligures are of relatively inhospitable character, and their attachment to money is well known. Their land, they say, is harsh and rocky, and does not have much to offer, so they must save every quadrans. Perhaps it was this ancient poverty that pushed many Ligures to take to the sea and become pirates. Although today control of the seas is under the watchful eye of the Empire, they keep living their sailing life, always on the edge (see page 137).

Albintimilium. The original name of this city, Album Intemelium, is an echo of its founders, the Ligurian people of the Intemeli. It enjoys a modicum of prosperity thanks to its position on the sea, access to some inland roads, and its condition as a *statio* on the Julia Augusta, being supplied directly from Gallia and, through the latter, from Iberia and Africa, making it a vibrant trade hub.

Albingaunum. The name of this city is of Ligurian origin. Back when we first colonized it, it was named Album Ingaunum, after the Ingauni. It rises on a rather wide coastal plain, where agriculture is possible and its harbor is rather busy.



Vada Sabatia. This is the last *statio* of the Via Aurelia and the beginning of the Aemilia Scauri, which leads to the inner territories, important for its direct connection with the Padus area. Close by is the small center of Sabatia and its port, though relatively unimportant, given its distance from the main road network.

Genua. Born as a coastal oppidum, it soon became an important emporium due to being halfway between the Tyrrhenian and Gallic coasts. It was back then a permanent military post for operations against the northern Ligures, and today is a trade port, although it does not have any advantage over the other coastal cities, some of which are better serviced by the road network.

Libarna. This beautiful Ligurian trade city watches over the access to the plain of the Via Postumia. It offers travelers comfortable hotels, well stocked shops to buy tack and harness, and workshops for the maintenance of vehicles. It overlooks a wide plain where its inhabitants herd cattle, grow grapes, and produce timber. Famously, its richly decorated theater and a grand amphitheater are unusually placed inside the walls, at the end of the decumanus maximus.

Dertona. Among the inner cities, the most important is Dertona, our first local colony. Being on the convergence between the most important avenues of communication of the area, it helped to consolidate our dominion over these not yet entirely pacified lands, and still to this day plays a key role. Trade is its main resource.

Aquae Statiellae. Of Ligurian origin, founded by the Statielli, and famous for its thermal waters, the city's modern infrastructure allows it to efficiently exploit the hot spring. Here was born Lucius Cornelius Julianus, esteemed librarian of our Emperor.

Hasta. This city is renowned for its grapes, used in an unusually sparkling wine, and for its ceramics.

Alba Pompeia. A rather small city that hides an unexpected wealth of rich private buildings, the source of the prosperity of its inhabitants is the recent fashion among the Imperial court in Rome of garnishing food with scales of a rare tuber with a pungent smell that grows only in these woods. The tuber is impossible to farm, and only the locals can trace it, with the help of dogs with a keen sense of smell. Therefore, this “trifola” fetches exorbitant prices that often match those of the jewels from nearby Valentia on the Padus.

THE *BASURAE* OF TRIORA

In the northern-most reaches of the Alpi Liguri, almost on the border with Gallia, the valley of Argentina is rich in chestnuts, wheat, and grapes, which are processed at the numerous local mills and wineries. It is deeper inland, along now rarely-used roads. The main local town, Triora or Tiora, is one of the Ligurian settlements that predate the Roman conquest. The town's name being similar to that of Tiora in Latium seems to not be chance, but a legacy of when the first Ligures took over Italia and founded their own colonies.

Recent reports, still to be verified, mention numerous instances of herds dying, sudden famine in specific areas of the fields and woods, and acid rains that burned only specific sections of entire crops. There are those who claim to have been called upon by the local women, casting curses as families feud with one another. Some of the local women are suspected to be *basurae*, capable of invoking hexes and curses; perhaps their name comes from the kisses (*basia*) they share with satyrs on certain nights, dancing naked on the banks of the so-called Lacus Dignus, holding candles. They often swear, calling on the primeval god Belanu, whom the Ligures worshiped in antiquity. Some of them are rumored to know how to fly riding a broom, which they use to reach these meetings even faster.

All of this is supposed to happen in the privacy of their homes or in the depths of dark woods, in secluded areas. Unfortunately, learning anything for certain is almost impossible, as travelers only rarely speak of their time in those lands. Some have heard of such things, but nobody ever seems to see anything. And if they do, they do not speak. As soon as we have the time and resources, we should investigate.

REGIO X
VENETIA AND HISTRIA

This vast region, too, is made of rather diverse territories. For the sake of simplicity, I have divided them into four areas: the Padus, the Veneta, Aquileia and Histria, and the valley of the Athesis.

The Padus area was first under Celtic dominance, inhabited by the Cenomani Gauls. Once under the influence of Rome, it was drained and plotted, mostly under the Divine Augustus, completely transforming its rural landscape into a vast expanse of cereal and grape fields, with widespread herding of sheep and bovines, as well as beekeeping. Numerous roads keep the area connected to the main cities of northern Italia, among them the Via Brixiana, joining the city of Brixia to Cremona, the Via Postumia, which connects Cremona to Aquileia, and the Mediolanum-Brixia-Truena axis. In the lands surrounding Mantua, the rivers have much importance.

The Venetian area, immediately recognizable at the delta of the Padus, was once inhabited by a people the legends claimed to hail from the Pontus Euxinus, in Asia. The Veneti fought in the Trojan War on the Trojan side, and after its defeat came to the *Italian* Peninsula, like Rome's own ancestors. Inevitable, then, was their alliance with our people, whom the Veneti taught how to tame horses, make tack and harness, and even make suits of armor optimized for riding. Roman influence among the Veneti has always been strong, making it a powerful bulwark against the insidious Gauls.

Geographically, this land is similar to coastal Aemilia, as it features lagoons and numerous navigable canals. The lands of the delta tend to be unhealthy and hard to travel, and only constant maintenance of the *fossae* (canals) makes their exploitation possible. However, centuries of careful work have made it so the river and the canals on the north-south axis allow sailing inside the lagoons more safely than in the open sea. In fact, this is the preferred communication system, even to land-based transportation. That navigation along the fossae is the preferred method of travel of the *cursus publicus*, too, is only natural.

The lands surrounding Aquileia belong to a different culture, more akin to the populations of coastal Illyricum. Aquileia, especially, is a vibrant crossroads of peoples and wares, as well as an important military settlement for the movement of troops and supplies to the frontiers. It is from here that the Via Julia Augusta leads to the province of Raetia.

Both the Venetian and Aquilean areas have florid trade, and so are serviced by numerous roads: the Via Postumia, beginning in Genua, the Aemilia Altinate, as its name suggests, servicing the area of Altino, the Via Popilia Annia, joining Ariminum to Aquileia following the coast, a segment of the Via Claudia Augusta, joining Mutina to Truena and called "Padanian", the Julia Augusta, leading from Aquileia to the Norico, and, finally, the Via Flavia, which services the Istrian Peninsula.

The valley of the Athesis is a frontier, dotted with oppida and other fortifications instead of great cities. The Via Claudia Augusta runs through it from Mutina to Pons Drusi, and then ventures deep into the Alpes Raeticae.

This wealthy region is important for its salt mines and the wool lauded by the poet Martial, but above all the Veneti excel at raising horses, as it is said they know how to speak with them. Some of our equites, instead, believe the merit is of the Venetian horses, claimed to be magical by some.

In the Padan area, the main cities are Brixia, Cremona, and Mantua.

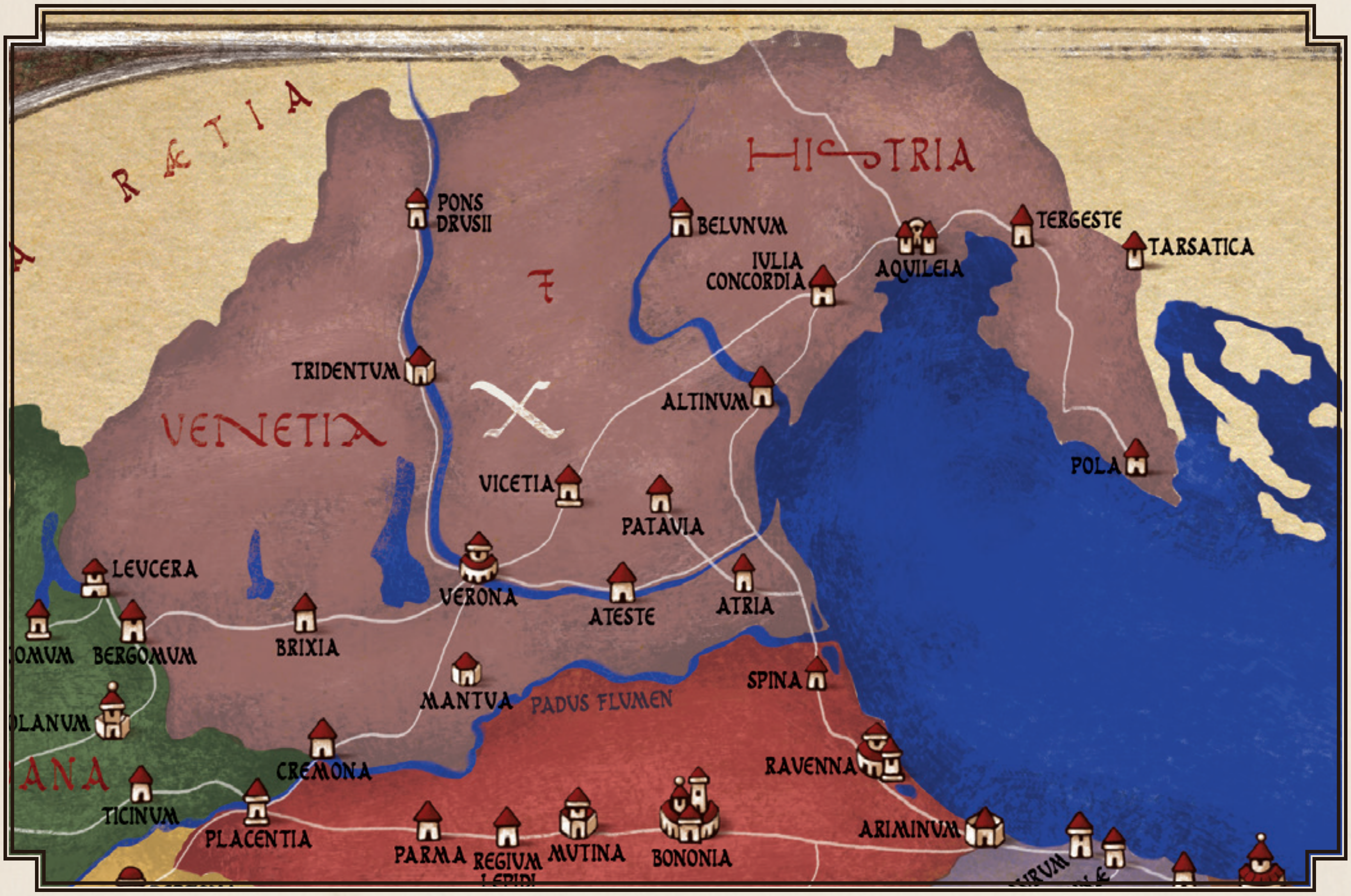
Brixia. Originally the most important settlement of the Cenomani Gauls, this city today has nothing left of its Gallic origin, boasting an orderly plan with numerous elegant public buildings and an efficient aqueduct gifted by the Divine Tiberius. Its proximity to quarries for beautiful building stones has led to the growth of numerous workshops with highly skilled artists. In addition, the industries of wool and metals seated here, providing equipment for the local recruitment center for the surrounding Alpine valleys, have contributed to its wealth.

Cremona. Our earliest colony north of the Padus, it had its maximum expansion in the Augustan age, although it declined after the devastation brought by the civil war of 822 AUC, and even after it was rebuilt, it never returned to its past prosperity. It still is an important port for those sailing the Padus, and has attained some local notoriety thanks to a rather thick sweet almond and honey pastry. Although not widespread outside of the region, this pastry is still appreciated by the most refined gourmands of the Capital, who have taken to gifting it cut in small bars during the festivity of *Sol Invictus*, at the end of the month of December.

Mantua. This city is of Etruscan origin, famous for being the birthplace of our most illustrious poet, P. Vergilius Maro. Standing on a small peninsula surrounded by the waters of the Mincius, it is quite small. "Parva Mantua" Martial called it, choosing this monicker not only for its diminutive size, but also for its lack of monumental edifices.

I should mention separately the charming area of the Lacus Benacensis, with no actual city, but dotted with numerous vici, fundi, and villas built on terraces on the hills overlooking the lake. They are not luxurious villas like those on the coasts of Latium or Campania, but comfortably rustic, surrounded with olive or grape orchards. The most famous is that of the poet Catulus, who so much loved this land and sang praises to beautiful Sirmio with immortal words.

In north-central Venetia, worthy of notice are the cities of Atria, Ateste, Patavia, and Vicetia, and on the eastern side Altinum, Iulia Concordia, Tarvisium, and Belunum.


RAETIA
HISTRIA
PONS DRVSII
BELVNVM
TERGESTE
TARSATICA
IVLIA CONCORDIA
AQVILEIA
TRIDENTVM
VENETIA
X
ALTINVM
POLA
VICETIA
PATAVIA
LEVCERA
VERONA
ATESTE
ATRIA
OMVM
BERGOMVM
BRIXIA
SPINA
MANTVA
PADVS FLVMEN
LANVM
RAVENNA
ANA
CREMONA
TICINVM
PLACENTIA
PARMA
REGIVM LEPIDI
MVTINA
BONONIA
ARIMINVM

Atria. This city is the one the mare Atriaticum, or Hadriaticum, is named after. It is on the northern-most branch of the Padus, and in ancient times was the most important port of the region. Spina has somewhat diminished its prestige, but Atria is still very florid nonetheless.

Ateste. This is a small settlement, known mostly for being crossed by the Athesis and being a handy stop for those taking the river inland or descending it towards the wealthy cities of the Adriatic coast. The surrounding hills are much appreciated for their pleasant position, and are in fact dotted with beautiful villas.

Patavia. One of the wealthier cities of the Empire, here live 500 Equites! Much of its wealth comes from trade, and especially its famous fabrics, the *Patavinae tunicae*. It has an efficient port on the river Meduacus, and the fossa Clodia connects it to the sea.

Nearby is also **Vicetia**, an oppidum on the Via Postumia. It is a modest town, although the Divine Augustus had a small theater built there. Although small, it is a somewhat important recruitment center of the Cohors Arcana, under the attentive management of the stern M. Claudius Garavusius, trainer of the *cursus sapiens*, with a decent career as a military engineer behind him in spite of his young age.

Altinum. To the northwest is beautiful Altinum, on a relatively large lagoon at the mouth of the Silis. Rising on the Via Popilia, it has much traffic, and a lively crowd often walks under the porches the Divine Tiberius had built, alongside temples and gardens. These magnificent buildings, much like all the others here, were erected on stilts to avoid the swamplands damaging their foundations.

Belunum. This is a small settlement on the Plavis, further to the north.

Iulia Concordia. On the Via Postumia, between Altinum and Aquileia, is Iulia Concordia, as small as it is militarily relevant, which controls the roads to Raetia. It is the seat of an **arrow manufacturer**, for which metal is imported from that province. Its workers, the *fabricenses*, are organized with military discipline and structure.

Aquileia. Along the Postumia is Aquileia. Born as an oppidum against the expansion of the Transalpine Gauls, it is today the most beautiful and wealthiest city of northern Italia. Emperor Augustus and the Imperial court spent much time here. It was also often used as residence by Emperor Marcus Aurelius during his campaigns against the Quadi and the Marcusmanni, and then was one of the preferred spots of Emperor Constantinus

THE HIDDEN WORLD OF THE LAGOON OF ALTINUM

Those who do not know these lands are naturally inclined to avoid the large lagoon from the mouth of the Medoacus River to beyond Altinum. However, that one is not unhealthy like most others, thanks to the combined effect of tides and currents that allow a constant change of water. The lagoon is open to the sea through three large access points that every day, at morning and night, allow water to flow from and to the sea. The maze of small islands surrounded by low waters, instead of discouraging travel, allows movement on small, one-man boats, so loved by the locals that even children know how to use them. Numerous canals, more or less artificial, some of them improved with brick and packed earth embankments, weave into a mesh of isles. The lagoon is, then, a small world bursting with life and numerous settlements. The local inhabitants are traders of great skill and bravery, capable of leaving their lagoon and reaching even faraway Sina. However, among the green islands and remote isles live other unusual characters: scholars who seek silence, artists in love with the numerous colors of the sea, inventors who enjoy the secrecy of those places, or even fugitives who, for both legal and illegal reasons, have had to flee society. Among the natives of the lagoon are four famous inventors of games of wit, much appreciated at the court of the Emperor, and the Bibliothecaria Arcanorum. The lagoon of Altinum offers shelter, and its inhabitants spontaneously protect the secrets of those who have chosen this secluded place as their home.
Its main settlements are:

- **Clugia or Clodia.** The only true local city, it is at the southern extremity, right beside the mouth of the Medoacus River. Highly valuable for its salt mines, it was built in the traditional, orderly way around the cardus and decomanus. Plinius the Elder claimed the *sal Clugiae*, the salt of Clodia, was the best in Italia, and a small but well-equipped port allows it to be exported.
- **Metamauco.** One of the most ancient settlements, it rises on one of the accesses that connect the lagoon to the Mare Adriaticum. The port of Metamauco is, then, of key importance and can be accessed both from the lagoon and from the sea. Its strategic position has earned the town a small permanent garrison and a fleet.
- **Litus Major and Litus Minor.** These are two small but florid trade hubs deep in the lagoon, tied mostly to Altinum and famous for the emporium-houses of rich merchants, some of which are decorated with mosaic floors and marble ornaments.
- **Rialtus (or "Rivus Altus").** A gathering of isles connected together by bridges into one large settlement, it owes its name to the town's port on the deepest canal of the lagoon, the Rivus Altus, sometimes called Grand Canal. Thanks to its central position in the lagoon, according to Imperial tradition, a market is held here every nine days, following the cycle of a *nùndina*. The market of Rialtus is well-stocked with goods, even those from far away lands, as it is also adequately connected to the wealthy Padan Plain and, on the other side, to the key trade and road hub of Aquileia. Canals and fossae joint it with Ravenna.
- **Spinalonga.** A long island at the center of the lagoon, it owes its name to its resemblance to a fish bone. It has good soil, with orchards, and houses their small population of farmers. A deep and long stretch of sea, the Rivus Altus Grand Canal, separates the isle from Rialtus.
- **Torculum.** This ia a vaguely round isle that hosts a growing community of traders tied to nearby Altinum.

and his dynasty. Famous and appreciated all over the world is its glasswork, and its jewelers, unmatched anywhere else in the Empire, are highly trained in cutting gems and working amber. Aquileia has numerous schools specializing in portrait sculptures, and is also the seat of an Imperial mint. It features a fluvial port, although it caters only to the needs of the town. Ships of high tonnage and the intense commercial traffic revolving around this wealthy settlement are handled by nearby Gradus.

Tergeste. A most ancient port, it plays a key role in keeping the local pirates from the Dalmatian coast and the inner lands of the Carni at bay. The most important local resource are the nearby building stone quarries. In the Istrian Peninsula, I must mention **Pola**, famous for its amphitheater, and **Tarsatica**, on the Dalmatian border.

Along the valley of the Athesis are Verona, Tridentum, and Pons Drusi, all on the Via Claudia Augusta.

Verona. An important road hub, its plan is orderly, and the city is surrounded by beautiful walls with two monumental gates. Famous tourist attractions are the Forum and its columns, decorated with two marble arches, and the famed amphitheater that the inhabitants colloquially call “Arena”.

Tridentum. This is a small fortified city with beautiful twin arched town gates. Of Celtic foundation, it stands on a position key for controlling of the high valley of the Athesis and its florid metallurgy industry.

Pons Drusi. On the furthermost border of Italia, it oversees the border with Raetia and ancient Noricum.

REGIO XI
TRANSPADANA

Named after the Padus, the eleventh region is called Transpadana. It has no sea access, though the river brings here all the fruits of the sea. Inhabited by Gallic tribes at first, even now that they have disappeared their presence still sometimes echoes in the names of its cities.

This vast territory features great mountains to the west, fading into part of the larger Padan Plain to the east.

For the most part, the main resource of the region is agriculture, with the exception of the lands to the northwest of Augusta Taurinorum, where the Gallic tradition of horse taming is still strong, and of the valley of the Duria, where mining is still predominant. In particular, its people extract gold from the surrounding lands, causing great protests from the local farmers when the miners divert rivers that irrigate their fields to sift for their precious metal.

Roads make communication easy, including the so-called Via Pedemontana or “of the lakes” that joints Verona, Brixia, Bergomum, and Comum, the Via Fulvia that connects three regions together (VIII, IX, and XI) from Placentia and extending from Augusta Taurinorum to Dertona, and finally the Ticinum-Mediolanum-Comum. Travelers should be extremely careful, however; in these lands is said to dwell a dragon of sorts that steals cattle and poisons the air with its venomous breath.

The best-known cities of this region are Augusta Taurinorum and Augusta Praetoria to the west, and, in the Padan Plain, Mediolanum, Comum, Ticinum, and Bergomum.

Augusta Taurinorum. This city’s name harkens back to its original inhabitants, the Taurini. It was first a military outpost to control the local Celts and the roads to Gallia, although the Taurini proved to be valiant allies and always allowed our armies to move to that province. It still to this day keeps the stern look and orderly planning of the castra that made the first settlement, but the city center features monumental buildings erected in the renovation after the fires caused by the clashing

Oto and Vitellius. The Forum is decorated with equestrian statues of our beloved Emperors, and the city has both an amphitheater and a small theater. Its walls feature four monumental gates, including the Porta Palatina, on the northern exit of the cardus maximus, and the matching Porta Marmorea to the south. The nighttime sentries bear a small medal carved with a five-pointed star, or sometimes trace that symbol on the ground to stand within it, to protect themselves against a large and evil goat-headed satyr that sometimes appears among the nightly mists. Similar rituals seem to be widespread among the farmers of the city's surroundings.

Augusta Paetoria. This city, too, is organized like the ancient castra. Here, however, unlike elsewhere, the relations between Rome and the local Gauls, the Salassi, have always been difficult. Only after the intervention of A. Terentius Valerius Messalla, ordered by the Divine Augustus, who sold as slaves all their able-bodied people, was the danger of revolts avoided on this remote border of Italia. Still today, however, the vale-dwellers remain close and distrustful, and prefer not to mingle with us. Augusta Praetoria is a forced stop for those willing to cross the Alps, and enjoys some prosperity. It has an amphitheater and a theater, as well as an elegant Forum with closed porches, indispensable due to the climate. There is also a grand public thermae building and an elegant honorary arch dedicated to Emperor Augustus for his victory over the Salassi. However, it still feels like a military settlement, and the most frequent cults are those dear to the soldiers, such as Mithra.

Mediolanum. In the eastern lands, this city owes its fortune to its position at the center of the great Padan Plain, where meets a complex system of land and fluvial avenues. Until the Augustan period, it was but a small town, although it has enjoyed a great expansion in the last two centuries, especially since the Emperors of the dynasty of Constantinus often chose it as Imperial residence. The grand Imperial palaces date back to that period, as well as the circus, thermae, and a whole district born to cater to the needs of the court, including diplomatic and military quarters. Those who have not been to Mediolanum are often surprised by the presence of a harbor! The city in fact rises on a network of navigable canals that in some spots are even eight feet wide. One of the canals in the southeast of the city is equipped as a small harbor and offers a useful stop for merchant vessels that stock up on both necessities and comforts before heading into the Padus through a series of small rivers and artificial canals. From the Padus, then, one reaches the coast of the Mare Adriaticum or, via Ravenna, Aquileia and the rest of the east.

Mediolanum is a beautiful and wealthy city, the imposing towers on its walls announcing its magnificence from a great distance away, so much so that some call it the "moral capital" of the Empire. A few years ago, however, rumors began spreading about a dragon awakening to occasionally devastate the countryside, seemingly particularly fond of eating children from their cribs.

THE DRACO MEDIOLANENSIS

The beautiful region of Mediolanum is said to be plagued by a child-eating monster, a serpent with clawed feet. It is presumed to be able to eat creatures larger than an infant, such as smaller cattle or even men, and those who live in the countryside fear it so greatly that they even gave it a name in frightful respect, "Tarantasius". In town, however, where it is less likely to strike and folks fear it less, they call it "the big grass snake" in mockery.

Where this "dragon" dwells is difficult to establish, and, although the most important city of the surroundings is Mediolanum and it is called *Draco Mediolanensis*, most of its raids seem to focus on the south. Here the Sarius and Abdua rivers, with their often-crossing courses, form a large swamp called Palus Gerunda, in which the monster is rumored to lair. Everybody avoids that area, as the swamp fumes are deadly. and some believe it is due not to the putrescent waters, but the poisonous breath of the monster.

Whatever it may be, the Draco has been spotted far from the Palus Gerunda, too, suggesting the creature is capable of covering great distances, with some claiming it can even fly.

Comum. An industrial city, known for its ironworks, it is a key stop for the communications between Mediolanum and the central provinces of the Empire, in spite of being eclipsed by the importance of the former. It is, also, the seat of a lake military fleet, commanded by a praefectus classis who, in addition to having jurisdiction over the lake, is tasked with managing the city, too.

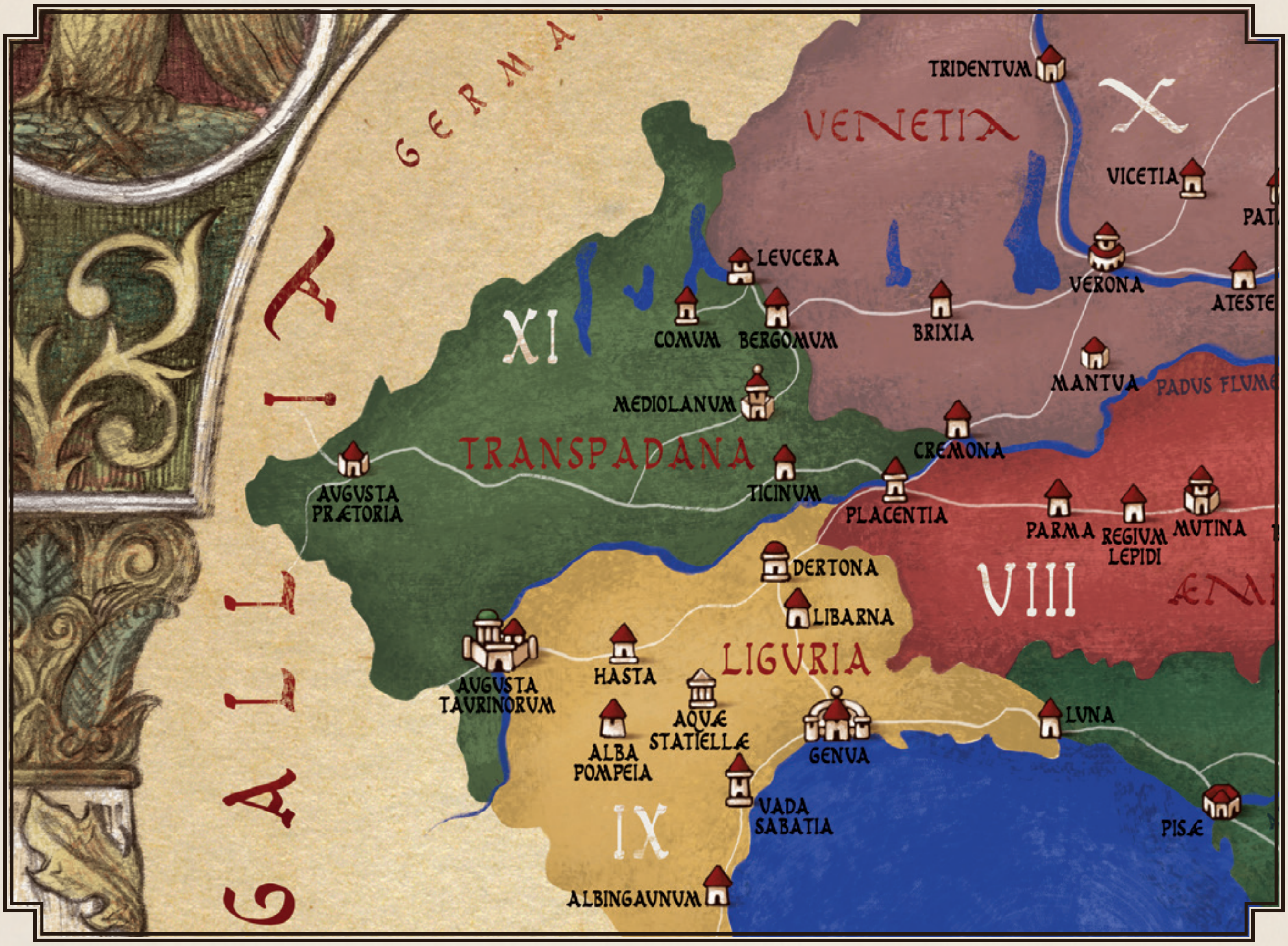
Bergomum. The main purpose of this city is to recruit soldiers for the nearby Alpine valleys.

Ticinum. This town is located on a favorable position in a system of navigable canals that connects what lies beyond the Alps with the Adriaticum and the Mare Nostrum. It is also of some commercial importance and is the seat of a small Imperial mint.

THE *COLLEGIUM NAUTARUM COMENSIUM*

The lake near Comum is so bountiful and deep that even large ships can sail it. As it connects the peninsula with the mountains to the north, it has always been under special surveillance from our troops and patrolled by a few military vessels, until it was recently decided to station an actual fleet under the command of a praefectus classis. The people around the lake have a consolidated sailing tradition, and here sailors abound as in any other coast, organized in an active corporation, the Collegium Nautarum Comensium (Comum Sailors College). They control almost all of the trade happening on and through the lake, and, although seated in Comum, have two important divisions: one on the northern extremity of the lake, in a place called Summus Lacus, and another on the eastern reaches, mirroring Comum, the town of Leucera.

The geography around the lake makes land travel northwards quite long, while taking the lake allows reaching the mountains in but a few hours. Taking a boat from Comum, one can even reach Clavenna, a key trade hub just to the north of the lake, in about sixteen hours. There begins a journey that leads to the pass of the Cunus Aureus and, through there, Raetia and all the northern regions.


GERMA
TRIDENTVM
VENETIA
X
VICETIA
PAT
LEVCERA
VERONA
ATESTE
XI
COMVM
BERGOMVM
BRIXIA
MANTVA
PADVS FLVM
MEDIOLANVM
TRANSPADANA
CREMONA
AVGVSTA PRÆTORIA
TICINVM
PLACENTIA
PARMA
REGIVM LEPIDI
MVTINA
DERTONA
LIBARNA
VIII
EMI
GALLIA
AVGVSTA TAVRINORVM
HASTA
LIGVRIA
AQVÆ STATIELLÆ
LVNA
ALBA POMPEIA
GENVA
IX
VADA SABATIA
PISÆ
ALBINGAVNVM

REGIO XII
SICILIA

None of the Mare Nostrum islands is of greater fame than Sicilia, land of ancient and mysterious powers. Here lived the Titans, and here Vulcan has his forge. It was also called Sicania by Thucydides, and is commonly called Trinakria for its triangular shape, as in Greek *akra* means "point", so the word "Trinakria" could translate into "The Three-pointed". Once, it was one with the land of the Bruttii, but now the two land masses are separated by a stretch of sea 15 miles long and one and a half wide. This cleaving of the earth is behind the name the Greeks gave to Rhegium, as the word *rhègnymi* means "I break". On the Sicilian side of this channel is still said to live monstrous Charybdis, daughter of Neptune and mother Earth, in the underwater depths; thrice a day she sucks sea water in and spits it out again with enough force to wreck passing ships.
The three vertices of the triangle that forms the isle are named Cape Pelorum, the vertex towards Italia right in front of Scylla, Cape Pachynum, the one pointing at Greece, and Cape Lilybaeum, the one pointing at Africa.

This land was colonized by Greeks, who made it wealthy and prosperous. Before that, it was held by the Phoenicians, from whom the Greeks took it with numerous and extremely expensive wars that wrought endless devastation and ruinous massacres on both sides. Once in our hands, Sicilia became

THE MONSTRUOS WHIRLPOOL OF CHARYBDIS

It's incredible to believe, but the monster called Charybdis was once a beautiful sea nymph, daughter of Neptune and mother Earth. Since birth, however, she proved greedy and careless. After a series of thefts from nymphs and minor deities, she made the mistake of stealing from Hercules a whole herd that belonged to the giant Gerio, eating some some and hiding the others. Jupiter then struck her with a lightning bolt that turned her into a giant monster, plunging her into the sea, back to the domain of her father, perhaps sparing her death at the hands of a wandering hero.
Under the protection of her father, she hid in the depths of the Sicilian sea, in the strait that separates the isle from Italia, right in front of monstrous Scylla. In dark waters, Charybdis is still as insatiable as she was before, now devoured by an endless thirst that she attempts to placate by taking in enormous amounts of water three times every day. Each time, she creates a whirling vortex so large and violent that it swallows any ship in the vicinity. Escape is impossible. Ulysses, when faced with the choice of crossing the strait on the side of Scylla or Charybdis, chose to tempt fate with the former, sure as he was that passing by the latter would have been certain doom.

Charybdis
Degree of Danger: 5
Size: 5
Value: DV20
1 die: Damage, Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Bello
3 dice: De Corpore, Hit Points
Hit Points: 60
Protections: Monstrous carapace (Protection 20)

- *Special Abilities:* Grab
- *Magic Powers:* Charybdis' Whirlpool*, Invulnerability (to all ranged weapons, except spears and harpoons)

** This power works like Poisonous Breath (see Core Rulebook), but it can be used only at sea, cannot be avoided by a* ***Coordinatio*** *roll, and inflicts the* Suffocation *condition instead of the* Poisoned *one. Charybdis can use this power up to 3 times a day, and it can be used outside of combat to sink passing ships.*

THE ISLANDS OF THE CYCLOPES

The last human being to ever set foot on these islands was Ulysses, who paid a hefty price for this mistake. Since those mythical times, nobody has ever wanted anything to do with this last bulwark of the power of the Cyclopes, so their precise location is lost, for both good and ill. It is not impossible, however, for some to have shipwrecked on these deadly shores in recent times and have suffered the fate of Ulysses' companions, devoured by Polyphemos, so I should at least attempt to provide a general position for them. As the Cyclopes inhabited the whole of Sicilia, and in particular the area around Mount Aetna, logic dictates that these islands are in the stretch of sea to the east of the volcano's coast. Some, however, identify these islands as those to its north, in the area of the city of Tyndaris.

It must be a small archipelago of four or five rather small islands, otherwise they would have been found already with good weather. We can also assume they are rocky and desolate, otherwise we would have found vegetation remains floating in the water. So, if they are so small and barren, they cannot sustain a large population, and even smaller if of giant creatures. This also poses the question of where all the Cyclopes actually are.

Expert travelers report that similar islands, connected to the presence of giants, are in other faraway parts of the Empire, too. One is said to be off of the coasts of the Scoti, in the cold sea of Britannia, while another is rumored to be somewhere close to remote Hibernia.

Such information would make sense if connected to the fact that, according to the poet Vergilius, the Cyclopes have access to a network of subterranean caves extending all over the seas and lands of the Empire (see page 151). The majority of the Cyclopes, then, could hide there and move with ease, reaching places otherwise apparently impossible to access – an occult enemy nobody is really aware of!

If this were true, from the islands of the Cyclopes in the Mare Nostrum one could enter this network and investigate it, as suicidal as that sounds. What commander would ever have the gall to bury his best men underground with a tribe of man-eating giants for their only company?

a florid granary, and for this reason it was divided into holdings, under the great latifundium system, both for agriculture and herding, especially in its central area.

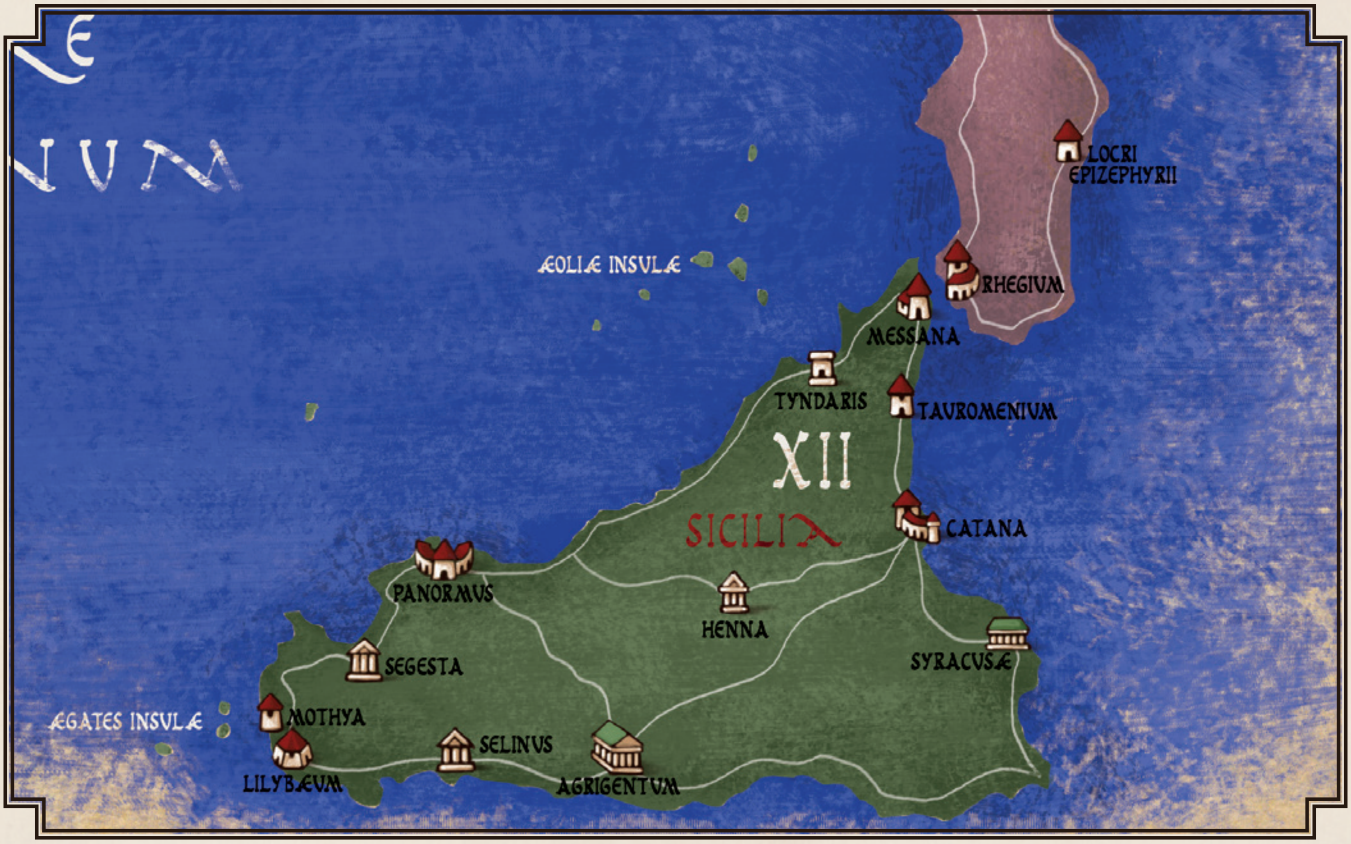
A little to the north of Sicilia is an archipelago of seven isles rich in sulfur, alum, and salt mines, but inhabited by rich merchants and skilled goldsmiths. They are called **Aeolian Isles**, as Aiolos lived here, contemplating the direction of the winds and how they shaped volcanic smoke plumes. Three of those islands have active volcanoes, Liparae, Strongyle, and Vulcanus, also called Therasia or Hiera by the Greeks. The last one was said to be the forge of the god Vulcan and inhabited by the Cyclopes, as well as connected to their subterranean caves. Now there is no trace of these enormous creatures, however, so they must surely live elsewhere.

The coasts of the isle feature numerous roads, the most important of which is the Via Valeria, which connects Panornus to Messana and runs then into Syracusae.

On the northern side of the isle are, from the strait, Messana, Tyndaris, and Panornus.

Messana. At first a port for Cuman Greek pirates, its ancient name is Zancle, "scythe" in the local dialect, after the arcing shape of its port. The city is in an ideal position to control the channel that separates Sicilia from Italia, and so has always been a sought-after prey during wartime. It has been devastated numerous times, and only after its definitive conquest by the troops of the Divine Augustus has it known lasting peace. The city stations an enhanced garrison as compared to other Italic cities, and not only because of its strategic position. The surroundings crawl with bands of Mamertini mercenaries (see page 139) who, although at the service of Rome, still require caution when approaching them. For all these reasons, the city garrisons a special Imperial legatus tasked with directly handling local matters. Presently, the position is held by M. Artemius Longinus, veteran of numerous wars in the service of the Empire and descendant of a family of ancient military tradition.

Tyndaris. On a rocky promontory that dominates the sea, it is a fortress extremely well stocked with foodstuffs and especially fit for maritime warfare, which made it a most useful ally of Rome in the wars against the Carthaginians. Among other things, it pro-



vided the ships for the expedition against Carthago that, in 607 AUC, culminated with the destruction of the enemy city, earning Tyndaris part of the spoils of war from Scipio Aemilianus.

Panormus. Of ancient Phoenician origin, Panormus has a pleasant port that has contributed to its relative prosperity. Its name, in truth, seems to derive from the Greek expression *pan hormos*, meaning "all port", after the natural basin on which it stands. It was an important Carthaginian naval base, and its key position allowed it to resist our sieges for a long time, until the troops of Hasdrubal were defeated by Caecilius Metellus. After this victory were captured a great many elephants, then paraded in the Urbs during that famous triumph.

Lilybaeum. On the western most reaches of the isle is Lilybaeum, named after its proximity to Libya, in Africa. With its bountiful springs, it was for a long time a privileged stop for the Carthaginians in Italia, and after that, in an ironic turning of tables, it was used by Scipio Africanus to invade Africa. The city has powerful defenses, walls and a deep moat to prevent the use of siege engines, while protected by its slums, which prevent access to the ports.

Mothya. A dark rumor has spread for some time on the isle. It seems, in fact, that the town of Mothya, near Lilybaeum, harbors followers of the ancient and bloodthirsty Phoenician god Baal-Moloch, the Devourer of Infants. Our observers have reported burials in the local Tophet, a dark place usually avoided by all, even those of Punic origin.

Selinus. To the south is Selinus, a ghost town now inhabited by supernatural entities instead of men. Once great and powerful under the Carthaginians and the Greeks, it decayed after Pyrrhus occupied it during the Second Punic War, and its people were deported to Lilybaeum. Seat of religious cults since time immemorial, she keeps being attended by the many followers of her ancient deities. Five temples stand beside its Acropolis, three more on the eastern hill, and to the west is the shrine to the mysterious Punic goddess called "She Who Brings Fruits", *Malophoros*. The Greeks identified this ancient goddess with Demeter, but the disconcerting presence of a temple dedicated to black Hekate in her shrine seems to hint to a darker cult. It is not infrequent, finally, to spot the symbol of the Phoenician goddess Tanit carved on the ruins of the city.

Agrigentum. Continuing to the south is Agrigentum, called Akragas by the Greeks, one of the most noble cities on the isle, difficult to conquer and bind. It was a Carthaginian base of operations of great importance, both for its port and for the supplies it could move, besieged numerous times and then conquered by our armies before its inhabitants were sold into slavery. In spite of this, the Agrigentini have recovered, and even formed a focal

ARCHIMEDES AND HIS MECHANISMS

After the conquest of Syracusae in 541 AUC, our scholars had the incredible chance to study some of the machines built by Archimedes. Some of them were used against us during our siege of the city, and so understanding their nature after suffering their effects in battle was cause for great celebration. Some were found still where they had been deployed for the battle, so our engineers could study their full functions.

However, as the fighting raged, either the disciples of Archimedes or the emissaries of the local government, it is still unclear who, hid other inventions of the great master, which sadly perished during the siege, so few were the mechanisms we found when the city was taken. For centuries, then, the secret agents of the Empire have been researching, fruitlessly until now, from scholars and libraries all over the Empire, in the hopes of tracing at least Archimedes' texts, if not his physical works.

CATANA AND THE CULT OF AEQUITAS

The adventure *Eye of the Cyclops* (see *Mysteries of the Empire, Volume I*) is set in Catana. If the players have not gone through the adventure already, they have the chance to learn by wandering around the city that a sect worshiping a seer named Aequitas has recently spread in the region. It appears that its members have infiltrated all strata of society, believing the spirit of giant Polyphemos speaks through Aequitas, and that one day he will free Sicilia of the Imperial presence. These events seem to reinforce the rumors claiming Mount Aetna is lived in by giants, and the Demiurge could send the Custodes to investigate this, prompting them to go on this adventure. If, instead, the players have already solved the mystery, the Demiurge may continue the campaign with a new investigation of another, lesser known, Sicilian sect that uses a symbol resembling the eye of a Cyclops (see page 150). The clues gathered in their fight against Aequitas may even help the group shed light on the other great danger looming on beautiful Sicilia, Typhoeus and some of his followers (see page.78).

point of anti-Roman resistance during the Second Punic War. After the institution of the province of Sicilia, Roman colonists were sent here to expedite the integration process, but it was not enough to defuse the local tenions. The local economy is prosperous and based on grain, wines, textiles, and the exploitation of the sulfur mines. This has given Agrigentum the resources to build superb temples and porches, famous among them the one to Zeus Olympian, second to no Greek temple, in spite of its lengthy construction.

Syracusae. On the eastern side of Sicilia is wonderful Syracusae. You must have surely heard that this is the largest and most beautiful of Greek cities, and I can tell you, its fame is well earned. It holds a strong position, it is incredibly beautiful no matter the angle one sees it from, both land and sea, and it has two ports almost seamlessly woven into its plant. Among the two inlets extends a narrow strip of land that is called the "isle" of Ortigia, connected to the rest of the city by a small bridge. Syracusae is so large it can be considered a gathering of five smaller towns. One of them is the above mentioned "isle", then is Acradina, the central district with the Forum and its works of art. Tycha is further north, owing its name to the temple of the Fortuna (*Tyche* in Greek), a rather refined neighborhood. Then is Neapolis, a newer district, as its name suggests, and finally the Epipolae, a wide plateau dominating the city from the northwest.

Syracusae, although so vast, is surrounded by mighty fortifications. It is so well defended that, when we attempted to lay siege to it during the Second Punic War, as it sided with the Carthaginians, we were kept at bay for two years, as we could take neither its walls nor the legendary war engines built by Archimedes. Only when the defenders were busy celebrating Artemis, could our soldiers move through the lower fortifications. The defense of Ortigia and Acradina lasted one more year, and the definitive conquest finally happened, I am saddened to say, only with treason. Today it is the capital of the island, and lucky is he who is tasked with administering it.

Catana. Halfway on the eastern side, this city has had an evolution entirely opposite of that of the other Sicilian cities, once mighty and now declining. Born as a small Greek settlement and conquered by the Syracusans in 350 AUC, its people were sold into slavery, but under our protection it prospered, even earning the monicker "most rich" from Cicero. Its amphitheater is even larger than Syracusae's, its circus is famed for the races that fetch fortunes in bets, and it even has a theater and a small covered odeon for concerts. I must also mention nearby **Mount Aetna**, behind the city, wonderful in its nightly flashes. Its crater is 50 stadii wide, its still-scalding hot ashes rain on Tauromenium and Catana, and its rumble is heard even in the massif of Maroum. Great is the fear it commands, and frightening legends abound on its nature. The most reassuring, which all prefer to believe, is that in its bowels lies the forge of the god Vulcan, and, because it is believed that disrespecting him could unleash its fury, the locals have erected a shrine at the feet of the mount. More disconcerting is the idea that below Aetna were imprisoned the Cyclopes when the gods banished them from Sicilia to grant the island to humankind. Not all of them seem to be there, however, as others are said to dwell off the local coast.

The most frightening legend claims that below Sicilia hides monstrous Typhoeus, the titan who swore eternal war against the gods above. He is supposed to conjure powerful flames through Mount Aetna, although his immense body ranges for miles and miles below the island.
Around Catana, also, is still active the cult of an ancient local god, Adranòs, who had a shrine dedicated to him not far away from the city, which was then closed by us when his cult was banned because it was incompatible with the official Roman deities. In its once-consecrated area still remain traces of a temple in the depths of a sacred woodland, infested by a breed of wild dogs, perhaps descendants of the legendary hounds consecrated to the god (see page 75).

Tauromenium. This city has been made relatively prosperous by its renowned wine, polychromatic marble, and timber.

Segesta. A city in the interior of the island, it is known for being the origin of the servile war of 649 AUC, the only true settlement in an area otherwise dominated by the latifundium.

Henna. Standing on a hill at the exact center of the island, at its top is a plateau with perennial springs, a peak cut off from any access. Around here are numerous groves, and the most beautiful flowers bloom in every season. Here blonde Ceres wandered for a long time, looking for her beloved daughter Proserpina, kidnapped around Lake Pergus by Pluto as he had suddenly come out of a nearby cave on his chariot. Pluto, however, had vanished back into the earth around Syracusae, and there came to be a lake on whose banks the Syracusans celebrate yearly festivities. Near Henna, instead, rises a most ancient shrine to Ceres (see page 95).

REGIO XIII
SARDINIA AND CORSICA

This region boasts the two largest islands of the Mare Nostrum, originally colonies under the dominion of Rome after the Carthaginian defeats during the First Punic War. They have been so for a long time, due to the strenuous resistance with which the local populations have opposed our rule, their hit and run tactics greatly favored by the terrain in spite of our drastic military superiority. Now, things have calmed, allowing us to consolidate and recently elevate the two islands to the status of region. In spite of this, the Roman and indigenous communities still coexist in difficult and precarious balance.
Sardinia is sometimes called "sandal-like" due to its characteristic shape. It is fertile, though mostly mountainous, and is one of the granaries of the Urbs. The land is divided among a few latifundium owners, and a wide portion belongs to the Empire. The island is connected to the continent by trade relations, with two Sardinian shipping companies, one from Caralis and the other from Turris Libisonis, seated in the Corporations Forum of Ostia.
The southwestern region is known for its abundant iron, silver, and gold mines, mostly Imperial-owned, which also double as penal complexes. Living conditions there are hard, as the *ad metalla* sentence, being condemned to work in the mines, only *looks* more clement than the capital one. Putting it simply, it is still death, albeit much slower and more painful.
To better control the territory, public roads have been built. The most important, also for commercial reasons, is the one leading from Caralis to Othoca and then bifurcating to Tharros to the west and Forum Traiani to the east. From there, the road delves into the mountain heart of the island, to split again to Turris Libisonis and Olbia. Two more roads run along the coasts, with minor ones and peripheral deviations crossing the inner areas as well.
Sardinia was inhabited for a long time by the Phoenicians, who left numerous traces here. It is enough to mention that in Caralis the most important town magistrates are not called Duoviri, but Sufeti, after the Punic office, and in the small settlement city of Bithia they still write in Punic characters.
Before the Phoenicians, in most ancient times, Sardinia was inhabited by a mysterious people of which nothing is known and who have not left any evidence of their existence other than numerous fortified towers. Some claim they were fortresses, others that they were temples dedicated to terrible deities, and the fear they command is still such that they are avoided and still respected as if sacred. Many say they have seen skull-faced warriors in clothes of unknown make restlessly wandering around them at night.
Concerning the mystery of the disappearance of their constructors, some scholars have turned to the myth of Atlantis, as told by Plato in his dialogues. According to them, Sardinia is that vast island of warriors and tower builders that lorded over nu-

merous lands, but was cast into ruin in a day and night by powerful earthquakes and floods. They say Atlantis was not completely submerged, but some of it remained above the surface, mostly covered in mud and the ruins of its vanished civilization, albeit deserted of people, and ready to be colonized.

Most scholars, however, shake their heads when faced with such bold claims. Even assuming that the kingdom of Atlas has indeed existed and is not just a rhetorical experiment invented by Plato, it is still hard to believe it has not sunk to the bottom of the sea, and actually is Sardinia.

Alternatively, many believe that these mysterious towers were built by the survivors of Atlantis, come to Sardinia after the destruction of their homeland, prospering there for centuries before disappearing for equally mysterious reasons. Even this hypothesis, however, leaves more doubts than it solves.

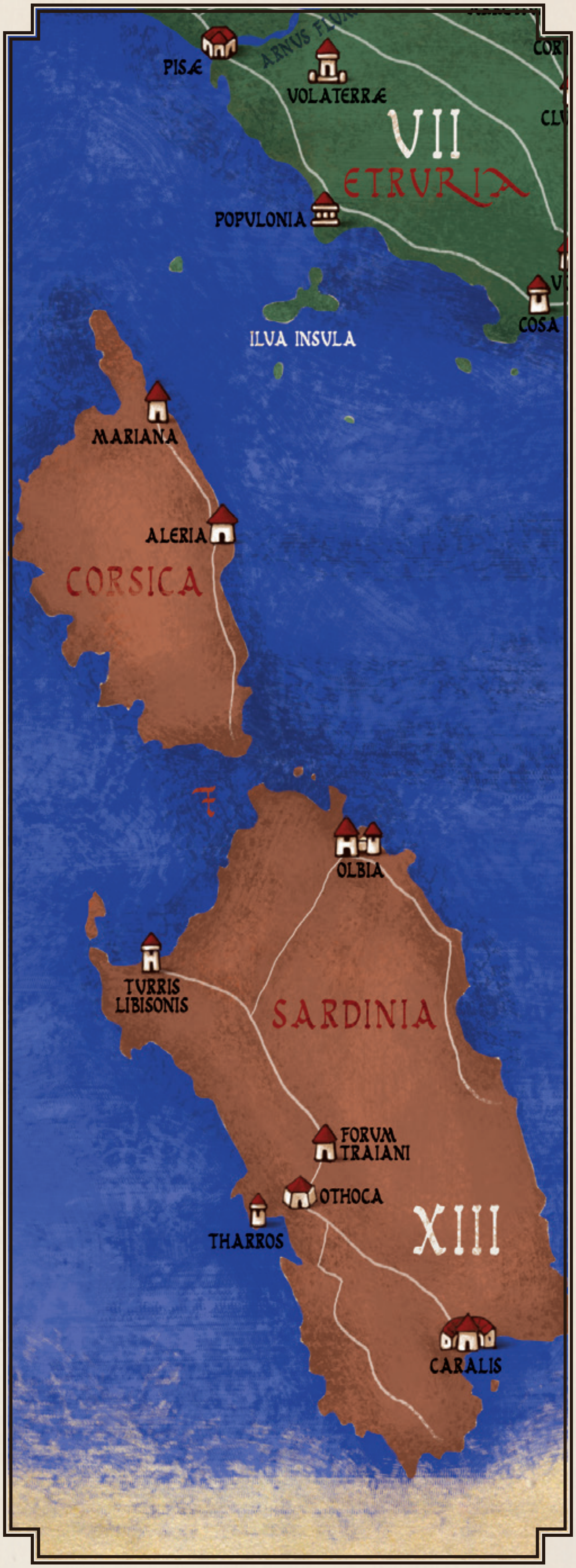
Even before the tower makers, it is said that Sardinia was inhabited by giant Laestrygonians, as proven by the numerous burials spread all over the island, which the locals call Tombs of the Giants. They are large bullhead-shaped sepulchers, their facades of large stones that, if viewed from above, look like the horns of this mighty animal. Incredibly ancient, they are mostly ruins now, although it seems that some, almost intact, still contain enormous bones.

The most important cities of the island are Caralis to the south and Turris Libisonis to the north.

Caralis. At first, this city did not play a role of great importance, as the capital of the island was considered to be nearby and beautiful Nora. Caralis grew in fame when, during the wars between Caesar and Pompeius, its people banished the pompeian governor to side with the Divine Julius. With a large natural bay, almost a closed lake of sorts, protected from the winds, it is a safe port and the seat of a detachment of the Misenum fleet. The port is made of two sections, inner and outer, with the outer one close to the pond, while the inner contains warehouses and service buildings. The city also features a beautiful residential district in its western neighborhoods, with luxurious homes like the villa of Tigellinus, below the imposing amphitheater half carved from a natural inlet in the hill.

Turris Libisonis. The first Roman colony on the island, it has always held great importance for Rome in supplying grain. Here, in fact, in addition to the usual town magistrates, resides an inspector of Rome, the Curator Rei Publicae, who keeps the local administration and its finances under control. The abundance of landing spots in the surroundings allows decent trade, as well as fishing.

Olbia. Guarded by twin walls with towers, this city, too, is key in supplying Rome with grain and is protected with a detachment of the Imperial fleet. It is also known for its works of brick and other clay derivatives, mostly made by workshops of Imperial property.



On the western coast, I must mention **Tharros**, in an ideal position for trading with southern Gallia and Iberia. Slightly inward is **Othoca**, a key road hub, and at the center of the island is **Forum Traiani**, key for the defense of the coastal plains against the incursions of the inner peoples. This city is obviously fortified, and often the seat of a military governor.

Called Cyrno by the Greeks, the island of Corsica is almost entirely untamed, and the only road traced here runs along the eastern coast connecting Aleria and Mariana. The central area is scarcely inhabited, mostly by people who live in rather primitive conditions. In their deep and impenetrable forests, the Corsi herd their animals and go on great hunts. They are an indomitable people, extremely hard to subdue, as they never bow to slavery, not even under pain of death. As such, their women are not advisable as wives for our people, as those careless legionaries who have married one know.
In Corsica, the cities worthy of this name are only two, Aleria and Mariana, both on the eastern coast.

Aleria. This was the first settlement on the island, founded by the Greeks under the name of Alalia. Not the most fortunate of building sites, as it is plagued by malaria, but it is a strategic location for control of the Etruscan coasts, which could explain the Greek choice.

Mariana. This small town was settled by Marius to fight Aleria, as it had sided with Sulla.

* * *

This is the Saturnia terra, great mother of crops and of valorous men. May the benign gods protect her and make her ever powerful and prosperous under the loving guidance of our lord the Emperor Theodomirus.
And to you, dearest Messalla, my salutations and most sincere wishes for a happy execution of your charges.

SI TU VALEAS BENE EST, EGO VALEO.

THE LAESTRYGONIAN GIANTS

Among the giant species said to have plagued our lands in mythical times, I must mention the Laestrygonians. Unlike the Cyclopes, they have two eyes like us, although this seems to be the only similarity they share with human kind, cruel, giant eaters of human flesh that they are.
When humans had not made their appearance yet, the Laestrygonians lived freely in the sunlight, and it is said that they initially settled Sicilia, but later moved to Sardinia, for they could not stand their brutish Cyclopes cousins. There they remained, until the gods decided to rid those lands of their presence to free them for us. The Laestrygonians then moved to Corsica.
Not as savage as the Cyclopes, the Laestrygonians do not suffer their presence.
They were capable of building beautiful, regular walls that defy the passing of time, and it is said that they made the mighty temple of Jupiter Anxur in Terracina (see page 83). They do not live in squalid caves, but in a real city, Telepylos, somewhere deep in Corsica. The city is said to have marvelous masonry, towers, buttresses, and every other form of defense imaginable, making a more impregnable place hard to imagine. It also seems that the Laestrygonians have their art of sorts; in Corsica, and to a lesser extent in Sardinia, are immense statues with mysterious and stylized features, their eyes wide and round, which the locals attribute to them.
How the Laestrygonians live is a mystery. If creatures of their size fed only on human flesh, Corsica would be uninhabited, so some believe they husband their own animals, like the Cyclopes, and that only in the case of grave famine do they raid human communities. It has been many centuries since the Laestrygonians have been blamed for any such accidents, so some hope it is over for good.

RUMORS AND GOSSIP

Wandering around markets and establishments, meeting travelers of all kinds, or even eavesdropping where they should not, characters gather all manner of rumors. Those spreading the rumors on the following table, whether addressing the characters or others, usually talk as if their source were fact, whether because they are friends with somebody in high society (the wife of a powerful town magistrate, a priest, etc.), or because they claim to know a direct witness, such as a business partner, the significant other of a sibling, an old comrade in arms, a cousin, etc.

When they see fit, the Demiurge rolls 1d20 on this table or chooses the rumor they prefer for the situation. Some of these rumors can even start small adventures...

As usual, not all that one hears in the streets is true! The italicized comment following each rumor provides details on the truthfulness of each event and is reserved to the Demiurge.

D20 Roll	Rumor
1	In the nearby woods, during the nights of full moon, wander figures cloaked in white and bearing silver sickles. They are a small community of druids that secretly lives at the edge of society and brew strange potions. ***False.***
2	Nearby is a spring dear to the nymphs, its water blessed with magical properties. ***True.*** *Those who drink it must roll 1d20 on the Magical Springs Table (see page 108).*
3	It seems Decurio Furius Camillus Metro is scheming to have his four-year-old son join the Ordo Decurionum. To do so, he has been riling the farmers against the ruling Aediles, who oppose such an irregularity. ***True.*** *Groups of insurgents with improvised weapons who attack whoever claims to act in the name of the establishment can frequently be found in the countryside.*
4	The local Schola Gladiatoria is about to be disbanded, its owner declaring bankruptcy. To buy their schola back and avoid being sold as slaves, the gladiators have been organizing fights with volunteers, where both champion and challenger wager large sums. ***True****. Given their skill and experience, the gladiators win almost all the fights (for their profiles, see the Core Rulebook).*
5	Spitting in the right sandal before wearing it protects against hexes. ***False****. This "refined" habit has only the effect of unsettling any bystander.*
6	A bad batch of garum was sold on the local market by ill-meaning Phoenician merchants. Eating in the local inns could lead to unpleasant digestive consequences. ***True****. Characters who eat in public places and fail a* ***Vigor*** *roll (DT 6) are plagued for 1d3 days by strong dysentery, suffering the* Sick *condition.*
7	In the nearby woods, at night, wanders an enormous and ferocious bear, twice normal size and with fiery eyes, eating anything in its path. ***False****, although whoever ventures at nighttime into that forest finds poachers who have spread the rumor in order to act unmolested.*
8	Locally, the price for wild onions has risen steeply, as everybody seems to hoard them for their aphrodisiac properties. ***True****, but at great expense to the breath of the locals.*

9	In the nearby forest grows a reddish mushroom that, if ingested in a decoction, with time grants prophetic visions. ***False.*** *It appears they were rare cases of autosuggestion.*
10	A revolting legion is marching on Rome to seat its commander as Emperor and is about to arrive in the local area to sack it for supplies. ***False****, but panic has already started to spread, and foreigners are viewed with suspicioun.*
11	In Rome, waste is beyond count. The Emperor has had numerous roads of the Forum paved with thin gold sheets, which require constant maintenance. As such, access has been denied to the plebs. ***Absolutely false!***
12	In Rome, it has just been decided to increase taxes on wine and olive oil. Their prices are about to rise soon. ***False,*** *but people still believe it. Finding wine and olive oil in the surroundings has become difficult because traders wait for its price to increase before selling it, greatly increasing the price of available stocks.*
13	One morning, all the small terracotta statuettes of the god Silvanus placed to protect the nearby fields were found decapitated, an omen considered a sign of great famine for the harvesting season. ***True.*** *The statuettes were broken by a group of local youngsters for fun, but crops have nothing to fear.*
14	Aulus Simplicius Carus, one of the Duoviri of the city, has mysteriously disappeared, kidnapped in the dead of the night by a wonderful black stallion. ***False.*** *He escaped with his lover, Lucilla, on an expensive black horse bought with the dowry of his wife, the daughter of a Roman senator.*
15-20	Consult the Local Rumors Table of the specific region.

VENETIA AND HISTRIA

15-16	If one has to take to the sea, one should do so on a swift *liburna* to avoid the pirates of the Dalmatian coasts, now particularly aggressive. ***True.*** *Pirates roam all over the northern Hadriaticus, save around Aquileia, where the sea is heavily patrolled by the Imperial fleet.*
17-18	Local timber production is about to be sequestered by Imperial authority for the production of a new war fleet, to fight Macedonian dissidents who want Macedonia to secede from the province of Graecia. ***False****, but the price of timber has already risen threefold.*
19-20	An octopus-headed man sometimes appears at the nearby mouth of a river, where the fresh waters mix with those from the sea. He terrorizes the locals, who would pay anything to a brave soul to free them from such a scourge. ***False.*** *The rumor was spread some distance away from the mouth of the river, but the locals do not know anything about it.*

UMBRIA; ETRURIA

15-16	Somewhere around Clusium is the underground tomb of Porsenna, mythical Etruscan king who had his golden chariot, pulled by twelve golden horses, buried with him. In the tomb are also jewels and other accessories, as well as five thousand golden hens. ***Partly true.*** *In truth, there is only one golden hen, with five thousand chicks.*
17-18	The shepherd Aulus, who lives nearby, speaks to his herds and, even more unusual, seems to understand what they say. ***False.*** *In truth, he speaks with many of the numerous birds in the area, as Aulus is the lucky owner of the Tùtulus of Turms (see page 187).*
19-20	In the nearby meadow, at night, one can hear flutes playing and songs in a mysterious language. ***True.*** *The phenomenon is inexplicable and happens only when there are no clouds in the sky, and so local farmers have stopped farming it. Beneath it is an Etruscan necropolis.*

SABINI AND SAMNIUM; PICENUM

15-16	The Marsi, a mountain people living deep in Samnium, know how to charm snakes with their song. ***True.***
17-18	The frequent pirate raids have gravely impaired the local economy. In the coastal taverns, it is easy to find numerous jobless sailors, often drunk and in a foul mood, and where they are, brawls soon follow. ***True.***
19-20	The local witches know how to brew potions that lend great vigor in battle. ***False.*** *The local women, however, brew a wonderful herbal liquor that charlatans have attempted to sell as the famous potion.*

APULIA, CALABRIA, AND HIRPINI; LUCANIA AND BRUTII; SICILIA

15-16	In the nearest town, the bartenders who owned the inn up to a few years before used to kill and butcher lonely travelers during the night, to then feed them to the other residents in the following days. Their bones and part of their belongings are still buried in the orchard of *Pulchra Aurora* inn. ***False.*** *This rumor could have been spread by the owners of a rival inn.*
17-18	Among the Hirpini and the Lucani are counted numerous people who, in the nights of the full moon, turn into wolves. It is not a coincidence that the names of these peoples derive from the word for "wolf" in their respective archaic languages. ***False.*** *In the case of the Hirpini, it is wolves that turn into humans, special companions to some of their warriors (see page 206). In the case of the Lucani, instead, they are formidable hunters of Versipellis and any other shapeshifting monsters.*
19-20	In a villa on the sea right outside Syracusae are held reckless feasts that feature Titus Quintius Pansa, the present Governor of Sicilia, unbeknownst to his wife Fabiana. ***False.*** *In truth, the Governor and his friends spectate and bet on rat races that Fabiana cannot stand.*

LATIUM AND CAMPANIA

15-16	Maidens left by their betrotheds make their way to a shrine on mount Circaeum and implore Circe to avenge their betrayed love. If the unlucky soul does not make amends in the meantime, they will turn into a raven on the next moonless night. ***False****…?*
17-18	It is said the villa of the Emperor in Capreae is watched over by Sirens who kill and devour those who come from the sea with hostile intent. ***False.*** *It is a rumor spread by the efficient surveillance service of the villa to discourage troublemakers.*
19-20	It is said that some fishermen from Spelunca saw in the cave below the Tiberian palace a horrid serpent devouring three unlucky boys under the dispassionate eye of the present Emperor. ***False.*** *They saw, in the flickering light of the torches, the statue of Laocoon that adorns the subterranean nymphaeum.*

LIGURIA; AEMILIA; TRANSPADANA

15-16	In the region of Liguria circulate *subaerati* coins (see *Non-Imperial Issuance of Coins* in the *Encyclopaedia Arcana*) bearing the image of Emperor Theodomirus. For this reason, in the whole of Liguria and its surroundings only payments in bronze or gold are accepted. ***True.*** *Subaerati coins are copper denarii and sestertii covered in silver to look genuine. Theodomirus had them minted in the hope the people would not notice, since as of late the state's coffers have been drained by excessive expenses (the institution of the Cohors Arcana among them).*
17-18	In the dead of night, masked people wander about, spreading a poisonous ointment on the doors of families that, the following day, fall ill to a mysterious and incurable disease. ***False****, but a plague is about to arrive in the area.*
19-20	A new recruitment campaign is about to begin in the city of Bergomum. All able-bodied males older than seventeen risk being drafted, and some are already fleeing to the Alpine valleys to hide. ***False****. No recruitment campaign is happening, but a few of the gullible have already gone into hiding…*

SARDINIA AND CORSICA

15-16	Flavia, the daughter of one of the quaestores of Caralis, is a witch. She cast a hex on the wife of another quaestor in town, Urgulanilla, and every now and then she is possessed by demons. ***False****, though the girl indeed has magical powers. She often falls into a precognitive trance, although she does not have much control over it.*
17-18	The coral of Sardinia, much sought-after for making jewels, is also a useful medicine for afflictions of the eyes. ***True****: However, it must be ground to a fine powder first.*
19-20	Nearby is an ancient fortified tower, without an entrance and with its top missing. Those who spend the night around it can hear bellicose chants in a mysterious language. ***False.*** *The area has numerous towers fitting that description, but no war chants or other voices are heard around them. The rumor could be referring to an enormous tower spotted on the coast of Corsica…*

PART II

ARCANA SATURNIAE TELLURIS

FROM THE REPORT OF THE MAGISTER AUGURUM
TO THE NEW GOVERNOR OF THE PROVINCIA ITALIA.

MARCUS AELIUS SAPIENS
EMINENTISSIMO, VIRO QUINTO VALERIO MESSALLAE SALUTEM DICIT.

I, Marcus Aelius Sapiens, unworthy Magister of the sacred College of the Augurs, pride myself in sending you, o Messalla, a detailed report on the state of arcane affairs in your new province.

I am sure the complexity of a land once the domain of multiple gods and then cradle of the power of Rome does not escape you, for it was her very presence that unified such a fragmented, and often dangerous, situation. This has undoubtedly brought relief and security where there was previously anguish and risk, but it has also led to forgetting those threats by lowering the level of awareness and prudence.

The magical currents that still wander our lands, secret and whispering, should not be left festering if one cherishes the safety of the State and its citizens.

This is why I gathered not just the information we know to be true, but also rumors, on the chance they are more than the fears of illiterate minds.

THE GODS OF ARCHAIC LATIUM

I shall begin my dissertation with the heart of the Empire. In Latium dwell ancient powers often forgotten by the common folk that we must not only know, but also honor appropriately, to avoid damage to the Empire.

DIANA ARICINA OR NEMORENSIS

Some 20 miles southeast of the Urbs, along the Via Appia in the vicinity of the town of Aricia, is a thick grove left untouched by man. It completely surrounds the Lacus Nemorensis, and is sacred to the goddess Diana Aricina, patroness of Aricia. For this reason, the lake is also called "Mirror of Diana", although in truth this term actually refers to the divining pool in front of her temple (see below).

THE THREEFOLD GODDESS

Although the name recalls the huntress goddess of our own pantheon, Diana of Aricia is a different deity. She is a *diva triformis*, goddess of three incarnations and three names: Diana, mistress of the woods and wild beasts, Trivia, who presides over crossroads, and Lucina, warden of childbirth. She is often mistakenly confused with dark Hekate, herself a *diva triformis*, out of ignorance. The name of this goddess contains the ancient word *dia*, which in our most archaic idiom indicates light, making her not a dark deity, but one who sits on the divide between light and dark, life and death. Women mostly pray to her form of Lucina to help them in childbirth and to protect them during labor, but her powers are not limited to that. Invoking her means invoking her help in seeing the light again, in many senses (see *New Indigitamenta* on page 171).

Her cult is so ancient that much has been buried by the sands of time. Her domain over life and death at the same time makes her a powerful and potentially dangerous goddess. Also, the way her most important priest, the Rex Nemorensis, is chosen is so particular that the Pontifices elected to treat her with the same wary respect granted to deities not yet included in the official cult. That place, then, is kept under discrete surveillance by the Flaminica of Diana, who often leaves Rome to spend long weeks in these mysterious woods.

THE SHRINE IN THE WOODS

Deep in the heart of the woods, there is an unusually large sacred complex of numerous buildings arrayed around a central temple. The shrine is inhabited by numerous priestesses, maidens, and women of all ages who left their families to live free in the name of the goddess.

The temple looks ancient, similar to those built by Etruscan architects when Rome was still in her infancy, although the shrine is even older, and some claim that below the buildings is presently still visible the original temple, hidden from visitors and known only to the Rex.

The true place of worship, however, is in the open. In front of the staircase to the temple is a wide circular opening, surrounded by regularly spaced, almost column-like, trees. At the center of the opening is a perfectly circular pond, a metaphor for the lunar disc, its water oddly still and often mistaken for a slate of glass by visitors. It is fresh water from the lake, but nobody knows how it is brought there and how can it be that its surface is always perfectly imperturbable, reflecting moonlight in the nights of the full moon. This is the "Mirror of Diana" proper, used for divination and special rites, said to have miraculous properties, and offered by the priestesses to pregnant women to ease their labor.

THE REX NEMORENSIS, THE ARMED PRIEST

Since time immemorial, the shrine has been ruled by a special priest called Rex Nemorensis, the One Who Always Bears the Sword. Whoever wishes to become Rex, it is known, must kill the acting one in a duel, and can issue the challenge at any moment.

It is a priesthood built on blood, its origins dating back to violent and necromantic events. It is said that young and handsome Hippolytus, son of the Athenian king Theseus, was courted by the Goddess of Love, Venus. He, however, had sworn himself to the goddess Diana, swearing to remain chaste for her. Venus then, enraged, had Fedra, second wife of his father, fall in love with the lad. Hippolytus rejected the advances of his stepmother, too, who in rage unjustly accused him of having raped her. Hippolytus was put to death by his own father, and Fedra took her own life out of shame. Diana, however, knowing the honesty of young Hippolytus, went beyond the veil of darkness and brought him back from Hades, into Italia, and hid him in the thick Nemorensis woods. Here Hippolytus became the first priest of the goddess, warden of the woods and of the magical bush with the Golden Bough, supposed to grant the living a safe access to Hades (see page 179).

TAKING THE PLACE OF THE REX

In a priesthood bound by blood and death, only he who kills the acting Rex can take his place. Anybody can challenge the Rex to become priest in his stead - the only requirement is finding the golden branch in the sacred woods first. Slaves, too, are allowed to fight, and it even seems that the majority of the priests of Diana Nemorensis began their journey as fugitive slaves.

It is believed that for as long as he holds the favor of his goddess, the acting Rex cannot be defeated. If he is killed, it is because the goddess has granted her protection to somebody else, instead.

Theoretically, it is not impossible for the Rex to be a Regina, as there are no rules that prevent women from taking the mantle, although so far we only know of a few female candidates who valiantly attempted to claim the famed sword, none of whom were actually successful.

Fighting the Rex Nemorensis is not easy, as he is the warden of the Golden Bough and is gifted with foresight, allowing him to prevail over the best of warriors. Therefore, whoever challenges him must be well aware who they are about to fight, for it may be their last!

FAUNUS, ANCIENT FATHER

Precise information on this most ancient of gods is scarce today. The most widespread version is that he is the Roman version of Pan, Greek god of nature and of boundless sensuality, although imagining him as a satyr with goat-like legs and horns is a mistake.

Faunus does not belong to the Greek tradition and has nothing to with the satyrs. Far from being a minor deity, Faunus is a god of great importance, well present in the most ancient myths of Italia and Latium. Some traditions claim he is the son of Saturnus, the first god to rule over the peninsula, while others say he is the son of Jupiter, father of the gods, and of the divine witch Circe, from whom he would have inherited his magical prowess.

Whatever his origin, for us what is important is his legacy. Faunus had from the goddess Marìca (see page 100) a son, Latinus, who became king of the ancient people who lived in Latium, and from whom eventually descended Romulus and Remus, becoming, then, the divine progenitor of Rome.

In his appearance, he has the looks of a young, muscular-but-lean man, with an ironic and amused stare. Often, he clutches a flute, which he gladly plays to accompany dances and songs, and he always loves a good joke. To those who play along with him, he gladly gives gifts and boons.

His own festivities, the Faunalia, are held on the 5th of December all over the Empire, and in Rome he is celebrated with great solemnity on the 15th of February, with the Lupercalia.

FAUNUS-LUPERCUS, THE SPIRIT OF THE WOLF

In the ancient history of Rome, the figure of Faunus coincides with that of mysterious Lupercus, to the point where those who are not born in the Urbs sometimes are led to believe they are two different deities. This is not the case, for Lupercus is none other than Faunus himself taking the form of a wolf, and thus called him the people who gathered around Romulus in the newly founded city. Roman history is deeply tied to these animals, beginning with the twins Romulus and Remus, fed by a wolf. Lupercus, as such, incarnates the spirit of the wolf, the very soul of the Roman people.

THE REX NEMORENSIS

Rex Nemorensis
Average Value: DV8
1 die: Ratio
2 dice: De Corpore, Hit Points, Sensibilitas
3 dice: De Bello, De Natura
Hit Points: 16
Weapons: Ensis (Damage 8)
Protections: Animal skins (Protection 3)

- *Special Abilities:* Acute Senses, Stealthy
- *Magic Powers:* Blessed Foresight*, Fate Roll, Prophecy

** This magic power works the same way as the Combat Talent of the Augur Office with the same name (see Core Rulebook).*

Guardian of the lake sacred to the goddess Diana and of the precious Golden Bough, the Rex Nemorensis is not an ordinary priest. In ancient times, only a fugitive slave could hold his mantle, and it was the only way to escape one's masters. However, it was not any less gruesome, as to take the mantle of Rex, one had to wrench it from his cold, dead hands. Death for death, life for life.

Today, anybody can be Rex, not just slaves, as long as they feel the same powerful drive, desperation, or utter terror. For these reasons, the Rex Nemorensis is most often a young man, although there have been exceptions. None, however, is known to have become truly old. The length of the service of a Rex is mostly due to the favor (or lack thereof) of the goddess Diana, but the Rex Nemorensis with the longest service expectancy is the one who never stops training, as well as observing his sacred duties.

The Rex is the lord of the shrine, but has no standing dwelling in it. As he must always assume somebody is out for him, he often sleeps in always different secluded and secret places and avoids giving his days any rigid schedule, even with all his daily duties. He spends much time in the sacred woods to make sure nobody loots the bushes for the Golden Bough, makes the sacrifices required by the goddess Diana, and welcomes visitors, although he often spies on their movements before showing himself, suddenly appearing from the depths of the woods.

The Rex has powerful foresight gifts, which he uses to help those who come to consult the Mirror of Diana, but also to protect himself in combat.

In this attribution, he is venerated in Rome in a cave at the foot of the Palatine Hill, the Lupercal, which tradition points to as the place where the mother wolf fed the twins. In the Urbs, his cult is celebrated by the Luperci, a priesthood unique the Urbs.

THE GOD OF WHISPERS AND SCREAMS

Faunus is a prophetic god. His name is connected with the term *fari*, which in ancient times indicated the act of speaking. The god grants speech to the natural world, and the whispers of nature are a vessel for his prophecies, from the rustling of leaves in the wind to the flowing of water.

Faunus also gives prophecies through the dreams of men, invading them with all the power of his divine essence and screaming his prophecies with unfettered force. The Augurs speak of actual possession, so extreme caution must be exercised when undertaking the rite of the *Incubatio Fauni* (see page 170).

The god manifests himself in the waking world, too, appearing in person to travelers in the woods or to those who pray sincerely. These apparitions often unleash pure panic, as Faunus carries with him the force unleashed by a waterfall or the quaking earth, and the very essence of nature. It is difficult for human beings to deal with such power, but those who can are more than lucky; Faunus is a benevolent friend of humanity, and of the Roman people in particular.

THE MAGIC FLUTE

Legends of ancient Latium tell that the god Faunus had a magical flute that could induce any feeling in men, from joy to to sadness, from love to hatred, and from bravery to terror. The instrument seems to be the base of the numerous, often contradictory, stories about him. Faunus is in fact sometimes depicted as a fearsome god, whose apparition terrorizes mortals, while other times, he is a charming rascal, gleefully seducing nymphs and mortal women without ever forcing them, unlike the other gods. Other stories claim he takes great pleasure in unleashing dances or songs that inebriate the senses. Some darker legends portray him as a ferocious warden of the forests, capable of exterminating entire groups of wanderers for an accidental slight. All of these stories seem to have their foundation in the effects of this magical flute, which over the centuries has shown mortals the many faces of this god.

The *Tibiae Fauni*, the flute of Faunus, is described on page 183.

THE SPRING ALBUNEA

Faunus prefers, above all, the woods consecrated to him in the Tiberine Mountains. Here is located a magic spring, named Albunea after its almost white waters, albae, and here the god grants oracles in their sleep to whoever asks for them. Not all, however, are ready to bear the incubatio of the god. Those who wish a prophecy must sacrifice a goat to him, drink a cup of water from the Albunea Spring, and sleep in the sacred woods. During the night, the god visits their dreams, giving accurate responses to those strong enough to bear the divine intrusion.

FERONIA, MISTRESS OF FREEDOM

An ancient goddess venerated by both Romans and Sabini, Feronia's name speaks of freedom, having the same origin as *ferus*, "savage", "untamed", or "with no master". As such, she is a well-loved deity by the liberti and the slaves who dream to be free of their shackles.

Feronia is portrayed as a regal woman with a crown, earning her the title of Regina, "Queen". She is celebrated on the 13th and the 15th of November, but has no love for blood sacrifices, so the faithful offer her flowers, fragrant branches, or small sculptures representing sick body parts in need of healing.

THE SHRINES AND THE "STONE OF FREEDOM"

The goddess does not love places where man's hand is too evident, instead preferring the wild lands and the freedom granted by untouched nature. The first places of worship of Feronia, then, were mostly the woods and mountains around Rome, with her followers eventually building shrines in two of them:

- **Lucus Feroniae (Feronia's Grove)**. As indicated by the term *lucus*, this is a sacred grove to the north of Rome, not far from Mount Sorax. Inside spills a sacred spring, the most ancient place of worship of Feronia, dating back to the times of King Tullus Hostilius and his frequent visits. It was shamefully sacked by the Carthaginian Hannibal during his raids in Italia in 542 AUC, and it was also thanks to to the rightful vengeance of the goddess that Italia was eventually freed of the invader.
- **Fanum Feroniae.** This shrine (*fanum*) is in a grove in the plain of Tarracina. It is often attended, as here is the "stone of freedom", a squared tuff boulder bearing the inscription, *"Bene meriti sedeant, surgant liberi": "The worthy sit here, so they may stand free."* It is believed that if a slave sits on the stone, they will soon be freed, although slavery is often interpreted with a symbolic meaning, whether it is being slave of money, wine, unrequited love, illness, or anything else. It is also attended by all those who wish to be freed from a heavy burden.

THE PRIESTS OF FERONIA

Feronia is served by an unofficial priesthood, as she does not impose bonds of any sort. She does not take adult males into her service, for their ties to public offices are too strong, so her people are made up of women of all ages or young males under 17 years of age. They are all volunteers and take turns in servicing the temple, to balance it with their other responsibilities:

- **Mulieres feronenses.** These are married matrons who live in their own houses and perform Feronia's rites in private. They are not required to wear any particular item of clothing, but when officiating the rites, they often wear a myrtle and rosemary crown. Once a year, every priestess moves to the shrine of the goddess for a month of service.
- **Juvenes feronenses.** These are young boys under 17 tears of age, chosen from among the strongest and most athletic in the families traditionally affiliated to the cult of Feronia, and usually one of their relatives is a priestess. They serve in groups of six, under the guidance of a priestess.

OPS, THE FIRST QUEEN

Ops was the first queen of the Roman heavens, well before Juno. According to the ancient tradition, Ops was the bride of Saturnus, mother of the ancient gods. Still today, the third day of Saturnalia is dedicated to her, although her own celebrations, the Opalia, are on the 25th of August, during the harvest season.

The name of the goddess is tied to wealth, as in our ancient language the word "opi" meant "abundance", "munificence", or "gifts". This word was also related to working the earth and the wealth that came of it. Still today, in the modern language of Rome, opus indicates the work of man.

Ops is an ancient queen who wields a power still at least equal to Juno's, with some even claiming in Latium she is stronger than more "modern" gods.

DOMINA ABUNDANTIA

For all of these reasons, Ops is often addressed as Domina Abundantia, Patroness of Wealth. In this attribution, she is portrayed with a crown of ears of corn and bearing a cornucopia bursting with fruits and flowers. The importance of this goddess for the prosperity of the Empire was still great in the time of Augustus, and still to this day in the Imperial palace is a statue of Augustus' wife, Empress Livia, dressed like Ops. After so many centuries, alas, the memory of her power has faded, and few know the words to invoke her (see *New Indigitamenta* on page 173).

MATER TURRITA

The most unusual characteristic of this ancient goddess is connected to the defense and safeguarding of wealth by any means necessary, including weapons. Ops, then, is the guardian of the fortifications that protect civilized life, and is also portrayed with a crown that is reminiscent of a fortress wall, bearing the monicker of Mater Turrita (Mother of the Towers), as well as great and terrible powers.

PALES, MANIFOLD DEITY

Pales already ruled before the birth of Rome. The ancient chronicles claim the twins Romulus and Remus chose to found the city on the same day of the celebration Pales, the 21st of April, thus making it the most ancient religious festival of Rome.

Pales is a such an ancient deity that they do not have definite characteristics. We do not even know if they are a god or goddess, if they are one deity or a duo, like the twins Castor and Polux, or even a triad, like that of Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva. The term "Pales" is both singular and plural, masculine and feminine, so it is left to the individual follower to decide whether to address them as a "god", "goddess", or, like some do, simply pray to "the Pales" as a plurality of deities.

The domain of Pales is equally ambiguous. First, they are a pastoral deity who protects herds, shepherds, and peace. However, they are also associated with war. In 477 AUC, our Consul Marcus Atilius Regulus consecrated a temple to Pales to celebrate the victory of our troops against the Salentini, proving they do not disdain battle. To those who know how to invoke them, Pales grants bizarre powers that afflict the enemy in unexpected ways (see *New Indigitamenta* on page 173).

It is said that in ancient times Pales lived on the Palatine Hill, now seat of the magnificent Imperial palaces of Rome. When Romulus laid on that hill the first city walls, Pales left it to the new community and retreated to the woodlands of Latium. In thanks, Romulus ordered that from that moment onwards Pales was to be celebrated with the utmost solemnity, associating them forever with the celebration of the Foundation of Rome.

THE PALILIA

On the 21st of April, in addition to the Birth of the Urbs, are celebrated the Palilia in honor of Pales. The rites are held differently in Rome than in the countrysid

- **Palilia urbanae.** Solemn and official *lustratio*, these are purification rites intended to cleanse the Urbs and reinforce the power of the *pomerium*, the invisible magical barrier surrounding the entire City, rites of great importance for the safety of the Urbs against evil. They are entrusted to the Vestalis Maxima, who officiates these rites on the altar of Vesta.
- **Palilia rusticae.** These rites are officiated in the fields and pastures, to protect them from disease, drought, or sterility. It is the only occasion on which the rite of the *lustratio* is performed with fire in addition to the usual water, the use of two opposing elements meant to mirror the two natures that Pales incarnates.

For the new ritual of the *Lustratio Aquae et Ignis*, see page 171.

THE LOST SHRINE OF PALES

As far as is known, there are no shrines to Pales. This deity is worshiped mostly in the countryside, their simple altars surrounded by groves and fields, although an important one is rumored to be in the mountains of Aemilia, not far from Bononia. It is said to contain an item of great power, an oval stone named *òmphalos*, the Greek word for "navel", rare and precious, as stones like that are found where mighty magical lines align. Therefore, the Stone of Pales, like many others like it, has been kept such a well-guarded secret that its memory has faded away almost entirely. No one but a few Augur scholars remembers its existence, and not even they know where the Stone of Pales is located, as the site of its shrine has been forgotten, and what research was done until now has yielded barely anything.

THE "UMBILICAL STONES"

Ancient traditions claim that there are twelve stones that mark places all over the world charged with magical significance. They are called "umbilical stones" or *òmphaloi* (sing. *òmphalos*), the Greek word for "navel". The location of only one is known, the one at the Oracle of Delphi, in Achaia, while one in Rome, called *Umbilicus Urbis Romee*, is only known to exist, its exact location being kept secret. According to tradition, there is one in the lost Italic shrine of Pales, two in Aegyptus (one in ancient Thebes and one in the oasis of Ammon), and a last one in Syria, in the city of Emesa, sacred to the Sun God. They are all seats of ancient cults, with strong ties to powerful magics, and it only makes sense that they hold items of equally great relevance. Research done in the northern regions of the Empire seems to point to at least three more *òmphaloi*: one in Britannia, one in Gallia, and one in Germania, although such rumors have not been confirmed yet. Of the remaining three, nothing is known.

The only *òmphalos* known in detail is Delphi's. It is a rather large item, roughly as tall as a wine amphora, but spherical. It is surrounded by an elaborate cord net that hides the stone underneath, leading to the hypothesis that the others are similar. They could vary in size, form, and material, but some believe they are all perfectly spherical. Others say that only the one in Delphi is large, while the others are the size of an apple, although it is also said that Rome's is the largest, being in the mother of all cities. A few scholars are certain that the twelve stones are all of different materials, each made of a stone typical of its area, such as basalt or Egyptian porphyry for those in Egypt, marble for the Greek one, travertine for the Roman, et cetera. Another theory, instead, claims they are all made of stone from the heavens.

Scholars do not even agree on their powers. Most say these stones are inert, marking instead the "breaches" between the world of men and others, teeming with magical forces, not granting any specific power if removed from their original place. A minority, instead, believe the stones to be inherently magical, granting power over the forces moving through these breaches to prevent them from harming mankind. A luckily small group of madmen ventured so far as claiming that with all the stones one would attain divine powers.

The main evidence of the presence of an umbilical stone are:

- Well-established oracles;
- Common folk occasionally having extremely precise prophecies;
- Unexplainable and regular supernatural phenomena;
- Unusually long-lived or healthy people, unaffected by certain diseases.

This is the evidence the emissaries of the Pontifices have based their research on to trace all of the umbilical stones.

SILVANUS, WARDER OF BORDERS

In ancient times, Silvanus was considered the protector of forests, fields, and pastures. The juxtaposition of wild places and the disciplined fields of mankind should not surprise, as the latter exist because of his benevolent concession of the former. It was he who allowed our forefathers to cut the forests, teeming with ancient spirits, and turn them into places fitting for the life of humans.

Silvanus ensures that we only take as much space from the supernatural world as we need, watching over the righteous balance and the border between the two realms.

In these modern times, many mistake him for Faunus or Greek Pan, portraying him with goat-like legs and horns. This is a grave mistake. Silvanus is a pastoral god, tied to the customs of our ancients, but has little to do with the frolicking and chaotic sensuality of Pan. Silvanus watches over well-tilled fields and helps shepherds with their sheep, all activities that require discipline, sense of duty, and often great commitment.

His ancient portrayals imagine him as a young bearded man crowned with pine branches, a farmer's scythe in hand and a dog at his side. Sometimes, he wields the shepherd's flute, others he bears a basket full of fruit.

Silvanus has no official celebration, perhaps because since the most ancient times he has never had a codified temple or priesthood. Every farmer or shepherd, however, is a priest of Silvanus, and none of them would ever forget to attribute honors to him, pouring milk or wine in the freshly tilled soil or on the heads of their sheep. Every field or pasture is his temple, a statue or other representation of this god protecting the borders of all the fields in ancient Latium.

Silvanus represents a power now unknown, but ever present to those who know where to look, as it is said that the few still capable of invoking him according to the ancient customs have from him a protection superior to that granted by better known deities (see *New Indigitamenta* on page 173).

HOSTILE GODS

Among the ancient *Italian* gods, some have been great enemies of Rome, malignant deities who ruled through fear. The advance of the Roman troops under the aegis of our benign gods has dispelled their dominion, restoring freedom and hope in the innocents, but also sapping much power from the acolytes of the local deities. These cults, then, although defeated, should not be considered as dealt with, since the signs of attempts to reorganize them are growing under the apparent calm.

ADRANÒS, THE DARK HUNTER

This god ruled on Sicilia before the coming of the Cyclopes. Fond of hunting, he wielded a spear and was always surrounded by dogs of great skill.

He was venerated for a long time by the ancient inhabitants of the island, the Sicani and the Siculi, but also held in high regard by the Greek cities. Dionysius the Great of Syracusae dedicated to him an entire city called Adranon and a shrine near Catana, on the slopes of Mount Aetna. It is said that the temple of the god was all of gray basalt, with enormous columns, and guarded by a thousand dogs of a special breed.

AN INTRANSIGENT, WARLIKE GOD

Adranòs is not an evil deity in the strictest sense, but intolerant of those who do not perfectly adhere to his traditions or treat him like any other divine being. When his wrath is roused, he becomes violent, shaking his spear to cause terrible earthquakes, killing with no remorse those who are guilty of not serving him as it befits his divine status, even if they are his own followers.

In ancient times, he was worshiped by hunters and any others who earned their living with the craft of arms. In particular, he had become the guiding deity of the Mamertini, mercenaries of central Italia who settled Sicilia (see page 139).

When we conquered Sicilia, making it our first colony, we attempted to absorb this god into the tolerated cults, as per common practice. His followers, however, numerous all over the island, roused the population against us in continuous rebellion. The Augurs consulted the Sibylline Books and were forced to make the hard decision of closing the temple of Adranòs and forbidding his worship forever. It seems that, in their private homes, Sicilians have kept worshiping Adranòs for a long time still, some even claiming the god has retained numerous followers and priests, called "adranites": priests and followers who could oppose Rome.

THE HOUNDS OF ADRANÒS

According to ancient legends, Adranòs owned dogs of exceptional size and intelligence, larger than a Molossus but as lean as Egyptian hounds, and capable of telling the intentions of those who visited the shrine. These dogs, now officially extinct, patrolled most of the area around the temple and guided pilgrims to the place of worship. They could tell who came bringing gifts or with sincere intentions, tearing apart any who wanted to sack the treasures of the shrine or harm the priests and the faithful. The legend claims they could track their masters even when far apart, as they shared with them a mind link of sorts.

To the present day, there is in Sicilia a local breed of dogs, the Aetnian Hounds, said to descend from those of Adranòs. They have great ears, similar to those of the Egyptian god Anubis, are lean but tough, and have a sandy gold mantle. They are not the size of the legendary dogs of Adranòs, their blood thinned too much through the centuries, as many say, but they are still dogs beyond compare, capable of defeating much larger animals with their cunning, like the best gladiators. For their profile, see page 199.

THE MYSTERIES OF THE PÀLICI

Laying with the nymph Thalia, Adranòs fathered two divine twins called “the Pàlici”. Unlike our Romulus and Remus, the Pàlici are a male and a female. They are deities of darkness, although not necessarily hostile. They watch over the secrets that cannot be revealed in the light and, according to the ancient legends, oversaw oath-taking and were capable of telling who was swearing falsely.

The Pàlici had a small temple in the plain of Catana, close to a roiling lake, considered untouchable, where many fugitives sought shelter, for it was believed that whoever looked for their protection but had committed a crime would be punished by the Pàlici upon entering their sacred grounds. Innocents, on the other hand, would prove their sincerity by taking a sacred oath.

In this shrine, in fact, was judged the honesty of oaths with a now-lost procedure. Some ancient documents kept by the Augurs suggest that one was to write the oath on wooden tablet, whether it was a business transaction, wedding contract, political pact, or anything else. Then, it was thrown into the pond. If it sank, the oath was dishonest, although it is unknown what happened to those who swore falsely.

The cult of the Pàlici is mysteric and forbidden in the Empire for two reasons. The first is the secrecy surrounding it, making it much more complex for the authorities to keep their followers under surveillance, while the second is the relationship between the two gods and choleric Adranòs.

MEPHITIS, INFERNAL MOTHER

Among the ancient Italic deities, Mephitis is the direst. Her cult was widespread among the ancient Osci and Samnites, and those who would then take the name of Hirpini (see page 103). It is no coincidence that the wars against the Samnites in the V Century AUC were the hardest our legions fought in Regio I, as our priests fought another, parallel, war against the followers of Mephitis and their evil magic. With the Osci, matters were different, as I shall explain later. The presence of this goddess has been reported even as far away as Celtic Aemilia.

THE DEADLY KISS OF THE GODDESS

Mephitis is an infernal deity whose domains are poison, destruction, and death. Unlike the other gods like her, who prefer the cold typical of the afterlife and death, Mephitis loves the heat that burns and destroys and the boiling smoke that obscures and chokes. There are no known portrayals of this goddess, so her followers worship her as poisonous fumes, her altars fed by the deadly vapors of burned substances, seen as the breath of the goddess from her very lips. The sacrifices to Mephitis do not include the use of a sacrificial knife, her victims instead tied to the altar and exposed to the toxic fumes as the goddess “kisses” and enshrouds them in her venomous essence.

The vapors from the altars of Mephitis slowly poison waters, soil, and air over long distances, making fields sterile and killing animals, or making them give birth to deformed offspring. Desolate lands are often evidence of the occult presence of places sacred to her.

However, do not be mistaken in believing such a cruel goddess has no followers. In the past, her cult was rather large, kept together mostly by fear. The poisons unleashed by Mephitis were used with skill to force her enemies into submission, for who would ever risk sterile fields and misshapen cattle? Bent by fear, the ancient peoples submitted willingly to the followers of Mephitis.

Only the strength of Rome could break this bond. The Osci, long oppressed by the Samnites, immediately realized the help of our people could free them of the yoke of Mephitis, so they joined Rome and, once the Samnite Wars were over, integrated seamlessly into Roman society. Among the Samnites, in contrast, the name of the Infernal Mother loomed for a long time.

THE SHRINE OF AMPSANCTUS

The main shrine of Mephitis is in the valley of Lake Ampsanctus, in Hirpinia, condemned to decay after the cult of Mephitis was eradicated after the Samnite Wars. Honesty demands, however, that I warn you that this is but the official version, to calm the local inhabitants. The truth is that the shrine of Ampsanctus remains a dangerous and dark place, kept under strict surveillance by special observers of the Augurs. Of other places sacred to Mephitis, we have lost memory.

The valley of Ampsanctus is unhealthy, thick with distorted and sickly vegetation. Trees and shrubs look faded, their trunks grayish, ash-like in color, their leaves a diseased yellow-green. No bird wanders there, although it is not a lifeless place; on the dry ground one can hear rustling and crunching, revealing the presence of slithering creatures.

At the center of the valley are the milky white and poisonous waters of a lake, the surface of which exudes an off-white mist, known in ancient times as “breath of Mephitis”. As such, it is doubly difficult to navigate, as on one side the mist blurs the shapes of the surroundings, and on the other it causes tears and makes breathing considerably harder. Those unfortunate enough to have tried to resist these symptoms have eventually died of poisoning.

THE SHELTER OF THE FURIES

Poisonous waters are not the only danger around the shrine of Mephitis. The ancient legends say the goddess granted shelter to the Furies when not tormenting mortals, leading many to think that around the lake should be a cave or crag where they live. The poet Vergilius, in the Aeneid, even gave a description of this place, mentioning a cave behind a crashing waterfall from which to delve into the depths of the earth to a passage to the Acheron, the infernal river. From there, the Furies swiftly execute the orders of Hades and Proserpina. The shrine of Mephitis, in short, could be one of the entrances to the Underworld.

SORANUS, THE APOLLO OF DARKNESS

Soranus was a deity worshiped by all the people of central Italia, including ancient Latini. The ignorant call him a god of the Afterlife, similar to Pluto or Greek Hades, although in truth he is not confined to the bowels of the earth, but rather a sun god, sometimes called in ancient texts the Apollo of the Darkness. With traditional Apollo he shares some characteristics, like the mastery of prophecy, the predilection for the bow, the spreading of pestilence, and being portrayed with rays of sunlight, although his is a black, grim, and frightful sun. He demands human sacrifices, unleashes chaos and causes pain, and spreads black fever on men and animals.

As such, it was preferred not to mention or portray him, to avoid attracting his attention or ire. The very word Soranus is not his real name, but a nickname meaning “the dark”. His only known effigy is an ancient Etruscan terracotta mask, found in the ancient shrine of Mount Sorax and today kept by the Augurs, portraying the god as handsome as Apollo, but with a leering sneer and two crossed sun rays or arrows on his lips.

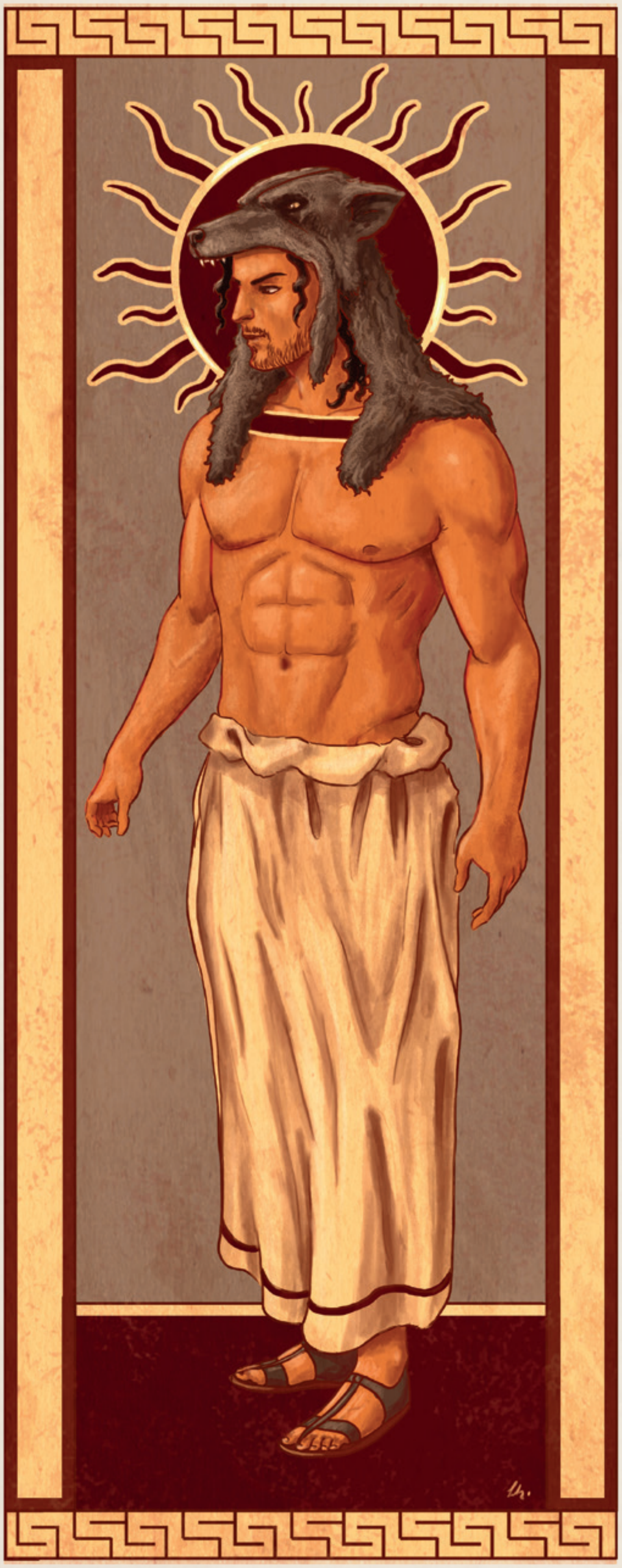
There are no buildings dedicated to Soranus, because none was built in his honor, his presence instead marked by black or volcanic memorial stones of grim colors such as dark blue, gray, or black. Some are still buried deep in the forests, often surrounded by arrow tips offered by his followers alongside the bones of the unlucky sacrificial victims.

The metal associated with him is lead, and it is on it that his ancient followers carved their supplications.

THE RITE OF THE WOLF

About the rites of this cult, not much is known. Officially, it disappeared centuries ago, when Rome took over the area, on the advice of the Augurs, leading to nobody ever hearing of it for many centuries.

Some time ago, however, began the reports of unusual wolf attacks. Although not unknown in the woodlands of central Italia, these attacks are unusual, as the bodies of their victims are gutted, but the rest of their body is left intact, as if the beast had attacked only the abdomen. Accurate research in the most ancient books of the Augurs hints at a connection with how the human sacrifices to Soranus used to be performed, tying the victim alive to the altar and letting wolves gore them. We fear a return of the cult of this deity of chaos.



THE COSMIC AXIS OF MOUNT SORAX

The epicenter of the cult of Soranus was Mount Sorax, to the north of the Urbs in the lower valley of the Tiberis, a lonely and grim mountain sacred to the Etruscans, Sabini, and Falisci. In particular, the expert Etruscan aruspices discovered its magical nature, claiming a celestial axis passed through it, connecting it directly to the world of the heavens, the earth, and the afterlife. The exact point is marked by a blue or grayish standing stone, a true cornerstone of the world.

Of course, extremely accurate research has been done to track the standing stone, but unfortunately it is almost impossible to wander those forests without being continuously harried by wolves, with such frequency and violence that they can only be unnatural. Some scholars believe that the stone itself is the origin of those events, as if attempting to protect itself with the weapons of nature.

The only way to prevent these attacks is to use pinewood torches, dispersing the wolves for long enough to allow their victims to run before being overwhelmed again.

CELEBRATING THE BLACK SUN

Since Soranus is a sun god, his celebration was held on the summer solstice, when his followers and priests gathered on a mountain to praise “the light in the dark”. They waited for the sun to set into the shortest night of the year and celebrated the God of the Black Sun, lighting numerous pinewood bonfires and scattering burning coals, on which his followers walked three times. Those who did not suffer damage in this ordeal were accepted into the Hirpi Soranus, the warrior priests of the god (see page 194).

During the celebration were performed many human sacrifices, both with the rite of the wolf and by simply throwing the victims into the flames.

TYPHOEUS, LORD OF CHAOS

The god Typhoeus is not just an enemy of Rome. He is an enemy of the entire universe. I must include such a cataclysmic force in this section, for quite a few legends tie it to this land.

The origins of Typhoeus are horrifying, being a monster with the sole purpose of spreading terror among the gods, let alone men. It is said that he is the son of the very queen of all deities, Juno, who conceived him all by herself, so angered was she at her husband, Jupiter. The king of the gods, in fact, had spawned brave Minerva from his own head, without the involvement of his spouse, so Juno had her bitter vengeance. Not only did she give birth to this monster, but she entrusted him to the Dracaenae, terrible creatures, half woman and half dragon, who have plagued the world ever since.

SWORN TO DESTRUCTION

Tiphoeus is an entity so evil that his very existence is sacrilege, his power so immense it is a threat to Jupiter's rule, the very symbol of measure and rationality. He is large beyond measure, as vast as the isle of Sicilia, which he hides under, if the legends are to be believed.

Everything in him is aimed at spreading pain and suffering. From his shoulders rise a hundred dragon heads, whose eyes glare flames and set anything in front of them on fire, making terrible, terrible sounds. Each scream fills the air with the howling of infernal dogs, hisses of snakes, growls of lions, bellows of bulls, and distorted and maddening human screams. As they flail around, they cause calamitous typhoons, uprooting anything on the land this monster claims as his own. Instead of legs, he has two immense snakes that can both slither and act as the human appendages.

His only reason to exist is to destroy the gods, as the careless desire for vengeance of Juno conjured a being devoured by rage, as powerful as a god, but driven by the same unstoppable violence as the Furies.

Juno herself, probably now regrets that decision, and knows that even her might may not be enough to defeat Typhoeus should the two ever fight, for he has no filial respect for her. Typhoeus is more akin to a war chariot let loose down a steep incline, barreling down at such speed that it cannot be

THE CHALLENGE OF TYPHOEUS TO THE GODS

Typhoeus boasts an illustrious origin, equal to that of all the gods of the heavens. He is not a mere monster, but am immortal deity, conceived by Juno without a father, to have her vengeance on Jupiter. The father of the gods had in fact just spawned the goddess Minerva, born already armed, of his skull, a numinous birth of pure intellect.

Juno, Goddess of Marriage and Procreation, could not bear such a challenge to her own domain, the offense made even worse by her husband and brother being the perpetrator. The goddess then chose to repay the affront in kind. She gave birth by herself to a creature capable of threatening the father of the gods and infused this son of hers with all her rage, nurturing him with hatred and divine power. The result was a monster of cataclysmic power.

Barely born, Typhoeus immediately set out to exact his mother's vengeance. He climbed Mount Olympus and attacked the gods who, caught by surprise and terrorized by the violent strength of Typhoeus, turned into animals and fled, hiding in the fiery lands of Aegyptus, possibly explaining why the Egyptians worship gods in animal form. So Typhoeus, deprived of his quarries, set out to devastate human kind.

Minerva scolded her father. She said it did not behoove the great Jupiter, the very father of the gods, to hide and abandon men to be wiped out, spurring him to move against the horrid creature. Jupiter and Minerva together moved against the monster, but were immediately defeated, the latter wounded and the former imprisoned in an underground cave in Cilicia. Then, Pan and Mercury joined the battle, the former distracting the monster with his bellows as the latter freed Jupiter and returned him to Mount Olympus. After he recovered from his wounds, Jupiter chased Typhoeus with his chariot drawn by eagles, raining thunder and lightning on him. Typhoeus attempted to bury Jupiter under entire mountains, wrenched off of the very earth and flung like mere pebbles, but the father of the gods pushed the monster westward. Eventually, near Sicilia, Typhoeus attempted to throw at Jupiter the island itself, but as he was lifting this enormous land, the father of the gods struck him with his most powerful lightning bolt, trapping Typhoeus berneath it.

It is said he is still there, plotting vengeance and tormenting Sicilia with a thousand earthquakes, as he attempts to break free from his rocky prison.

stopped, to trample anything in his path. He will have peace only when everything is dead: gods, men, sun, moon, and the heavens all.

AN UNKNOWN PRISON

It is difficult to understand where Typhoeus hides. The most common belief is that he is still chained below Sicilia, where Jupiter confined him at the dawn of time.

Even more ancient traditions, however, place him in the depths of the island of Aenaria (Pithecusa in Greek), in the Gulf of Neapolis, possibly the source of the fires coming from the isle, similar to those found all over the area between Cumae, the Flaegrean Fields, and Mount Vesuvius. Its width could fit the presence of a monster of such size, and yet the reason why such evil is there is even more disconcerting.

Aenaria stands in one of the wealthiest regions of the entire Italic province, teeming with villas of rich patricians, with the Emperor himself owning a most ancient one on the isle of Capreae, not far away, commissioned many centuries ago by Emperor Tiberius.

FATHER OF MONSTERS

Typhoeus is the first of a long line of monsters, many or whom he generated with Echidna:

- **Cerberus**, the infernal three-headed hound;
- **Ortho**, another infernal hound, with two heads and a serpent for a tail;
- **Hydra**, the reptile with multiple heads that grows more when one is cut off;
- **Sphinx**, the monster with the body of a lion and the head of a woman that afflicts the sands of Egypt;
- **Chimera**, another creature with a leonine body, but the head of a goat on the back and a serpent for a tail.

Also, Typhoeus constantly conjures violent winds, the typhoons, which cause great destruction to the works of men. His descendants are the two most benign of winds, however, Boreas and Zephyrus.

THE DRACAENAE, COMPANIONS OF TYPHOEUS

Also called *Drakàinai* in Greek, the Dracaenae are female monsters with the torso of a most beautiful nymph and two serpents for legs, capable of flying with powerful wings. Their nature is cruel and violent, with the strength, speed, and insatiable hunger of dragons, but also human cunning and charm, and a love for jewels and trinkets.

They are loyal companions of Typhoeus, and it is said that they are his agents to further his dark plans.

The Dracaenae are:

- **Kampe**. The warden of the place in the Underworld where Jupiter relegates monsters and rebellious gods. Among those entrusted to her custody are the Cyclopes and the three rebel giants called "Hecatoncheires", "the hundred handed". She has the body of a dragon, serpents for hair, the tail of a scorpion, and wings on her back.
- **Poine**. Her name in Latin is rather indicative, Poena ("Pain"), as she brings endless suffering to those who have committed crimes of blood. She is inspired by a cruel sense of justice, and seems to be the most rational among the Drachainai. She was summoned by Apollo to punish the inhabitants of Argos, who killed his son Linos. Some claim she is the mother of the Furies, the furious spirits of vengeance.
- **Sibaris**. This Dracaena bears the same name of the magnificent city on the coast of Calabria, destroyed by Kroton in 309 AUC in an attempt, many believe, to defeat this terrible monster.

For the profile of the Dracaenae, see page 202.

THE MAGICAL HEART OF CAMPANIA FELIX

Descending to the south of Latium into Campania Felix, one passes through the Italic region that is possibly the most dense with magic. Around Cumae is the shrine of Apollo, said to hide many ancient secrets, like the shrine where the famous prophetess Sibylla lived for centuries, or one of the presumed entrances to Hades.

THE SHRINE TO APOLLO AT CUMAE, KEEPER OF ANCIENT SECRETS

Rising on a hill overlooking the sea, the shrine is built on a terrace with many other buildings. The main one is, of course, the temple dedicated to the god of prophecy, Apollo, said to have been built by Daedalus, offering the wings that allowed him to fly across the Mare Nostrum.

The ancient stories report that Daedalus, the famous Greek architect known for his countless inventions and his unparallelled artistic skill, was imprisoned by King Minos in his very own Labyrinth of Knossos. He escaped only by fashioning the famous wings that subsequently led to the death of his young son, Icarus, who never reached the coast of Italia, where his father wished to take refuge. Icarus plummeted into the sea, his wings melting when he dared to fly too close to the sun.

Daedalus, exhausted, then landed in Cumae, where he built the temple of Apollo and decorated it with the symbols of the god, lyres surrounded by elegant wreaths, as well as the main events of his adventurous life. The doors of the temple bear images of the foolish queen of Knossos, Pasiphaë, mating with a bull as she hides in a cow-shaped statue, made by Daedalus at her request. Then is shown the son of this cursed love, the monstrous Minotaur, locked in the Labyrinth by order of King Minos. There is also a detailed portrayal of the Labyrinth, an ingenious work of Daedalus, in all its inextricable complexity. Then is shown Daedalus helping Theseus and Ariadne and the famous cord, drawing the ire of the king, who orders them to be locked in with the Minotaur.

It is said that the wings are still kept by the priests of the temple, a relic too dangerous for human hands (see page 185).

THE CAVE OF THE SIBYLLA

On the slopes of the promontory of the shrine to Apollo is a cave with a large entrance where lives the Sibylla, a prophetess known all over the Empire, and other priestesses. The cave is easily spotted, as it is perhaps the most famous oracle in Italia, with countless people coming and going, even from faraway lands.

It is not a cave proper, however. Perhaps in most ancient times the prophetess lived on the naked side of the hill, but after so many centuries the hand of man has altered it, making it worthy of the great fluxes of pilgrims.

The entrance has kept its natural appearance, but beyond it is a vast tunnel, carefully built by a skilled architect. It has a trapezoidal section with a wide base, and inclined walls that narrow at the top, to allow the structure to withstand the frequent quaking of the earth.

The tunnel delves into the depths of the mountain for around four hundred feet at a slight downward angle. On the wall to the right open nine minor corridors, leading to service rooms, personnel dwellings, and water cisterns. Two of them lead to the outside and allow the local servants to take care of the everyday business of the temple.

On the left wall, roughly halfway through, opens a wider tunnel, closed by a locked door. It leads to three beautiful rooms, two of them quarters for the priestesses and the third a common room. Access to this area is barred by a door whose keys are kept by the priestesses at all times.

At the end of the corridor is a wide, vaulted room, with rows of orderly arrayed benches, the area where the pilgrims coming to ask an omen of the Sibylla wait. A door on the left leads to the quarters of the prophetess, made up of three small rooms. The largest is furnished with a three-legged tall bronze throne, where the Sibylla sits to give her oracles, a brazier for burning ritual herbs, a crate full of palm leaves on which the Sibylla writes her prophecies, and a shallow well for ventilation.

OTHER DEEDS OF DAEDALUS IN ITALIA

The wings are but one of the fabled artifacts invented by Daedalus. Escaping from Knossos, before reaching Cumae, the famous architect spent much time in Sicilia, taking shelter at the court of Cocalos, king of Kamikos. Minos demanded the fugitive to be handed over, but Cocalos refused, the skills of the Athenian craftsman being too precious to part with them. Minos then laid siege to the royal palace, forcing Cocalos to capitulate and invite him to a banquet offering the restitution of Daedalus. The king of Kamikos had planned for Minos a bath with his three daughters, but Daedalus, also master of the hydraulic arts, had fitted the pool with hidden taps that killed Minos by flooding the pool with scalding hot water. According to an alternative version of the tale, Cocalos was killed as he fought with Minos. In Sicilia, Daedalus is considered the builder of the water reservoir basin on the Alabo river, a steam bath in Selinus, a fortress in Agrigentum, and the terrace of the temple of Aphrodite in Eryx, where he is supposed to have also left a large golden sieve. He is attributed to be the inventor of the sail, and it is believed that he gifted glue to humanity, as well as the majority of the tools used by carpenters, in particular the axe, drill, and saw. It seems that in the temple of Athena in Athens he had left a folding chair, as well as numerous statues with articulated eyes and limbs, similar to the theurgic constructs found both in Achaia and in Italia, called *daedala* (for more information about the latter, read the *Aegyptus – The Sands of Gold and Time* module). In Sardinia, finally, he is attributed with the Daedalic Towers (see page 154).

THE PROPHECIES OF THE SIBYLLA

The prophetess sees the future by the favor of the god Apollo. When she is asked a question, she gathers in meditation, surrounded by the vapors of the brazier, where burn special herbs that favor her concentration. Her soul reaches up to the Lord of the Arts and the Muses, expressing her oracles in hexameters on palm leaves.

However, the answer is never just one. The Sibylla is known for, at times, writing numerous verses for just one question, leaving the palm leaves on which she wrote them in the small well near her throne. Here, the constant air currents from tens (some even say hundreds) of small openings shuffle the leaves for the priestesses to read the sequence they are drawn in. The results are often obscure, so the majority of those who ask the Sibylla have her responses interpreted by the priestesses. Others, however, perhaps more versed in the divining arts, or with an unusual magical sensitivity, prefer to receive the response as it left the prophetess' lips, trusting the god to grant them the right interpretation.

SIBYLLA, PROPHETESS OF APOLLO

The Sibylla
Value: DV10
1 die: De Corpore, Hit Points
2 dice: Ratio
3 dice: De Magia, Sensibilitas
Hit Points: 10
Weapons: None
Protections: None

ᛉ *Magic Powers:* Fate Roll, Prophecy

The Sibylla is a figure shrouded in the mists of time and legend. On her bronze throne has sat a Sibylla for so many centuries that many now believe she is immortal, and the legends seem to confirm this theory.

It is said that the Sibylla was once a beautiful and brilliant maiden, her talent for divination drawing the attention of the god Apollo, who fell in love with her and granted her foresight and immortality.

Many, however, believe this is but a legend, and the Sibylla is only the most gifted of the priestesses who serve the oracle of Apollo in Cumae. When the acting prophetess dies, another takes her place, ensuring the continuity of the oracle.

Others, however, believe that "Sibylla" is not a personal name and does not refer to a specific person, but is a title reserved to the seers inspired by Apollo. In addition to the Sibylla Cumana, then, there are others all over the world, each named after the location she lives in (see page 86).

The prophetess of Cumae has greater prophetic powers and skill in understanding the souls of those who come to her. In truth, there is evidence of this Sibylla not just being a prophetess. Vergilius, a poet known for his great arcane knowledge, in the Aeneid provides an interesting detail about the powers of the Sibylla; she guides Aeneas into Hades to meet the spirit of his father, having been there before. The powers of this prophetess, then, are not only limited to the bronze throne of prophecy, but also allow her to delve into the dark realms of Pluto and Proserpina. The great poet then adds that the Sibylla is tightly connected to Hekate, a goddess deeply connected to magic. The powers of the Sibylla are twofold, solar and prophetic, granted by Apollo, but also dark and magical, as given by Hekate. It is known to all that the Sibylla Cumana speaks her responses in a state of divine trance, possessed by the spirit of Apollo, although it is equally possible that she is visited by Hekate's. This could explain why the prophecies of the Sibylla reach the remote past as well as the most distant future, speaking of life and death as she delves into the unknown regions of the heavens and earth. It is not a coincidence that the Sibylla lives close to one of the rumored entrances to Hades, watching over that threshold.

LAKE AVERNUS, ENTRANCE TO THE UNDERWORLD

Delving deeper inland from the promontory of the Sibylla, Lake Avernus is not far away. It is a circular body of water of still-unknown size, as the constant mists that fill the eyes with illusions and the ears with silence or constant murmuring make measuring it impossible. Wandering around the banks of the lake is an unnerving experience, as the area is eerily calm and devoid of life. Birds do not fly there, the word "Avernus" being a possible derivation of the Greek *àornos*, meaning "birdless". Ground animals dare not venture there, for the waters are black, oddly shining, and smooth, a slate of well-polished glass stone. It is not disturbed either by whirl or by insects, and no human with a shred of common sense dares cross it by boat, for it looks dead. However, a dark energy makes it vibrant with power. Our agents watching the lake from the mountain claim to see weird flashes at night, while the patrols report to have heard maddening calls, howls, and whispers. This must stay between us, but some never made their way back.

Our most ancient legends state that this lake is the entrance to the Underworld, the realm of Pluto and Proserpina, one of the most dangerous places in the entire world. They also add one more unnerving detail: the breach to Hades seems to be kept by a monstrous guardian, the three-headed hound Cerberus, ready to devour any who dare to approach.

The exact position of this entrance, however, is unknown. Some say one must enter a cave, others that one must reach the exact center of the lake. Other legends claim that the entrance is in a tunnel that begins in the cave of the Sibylla herself.

The truth is that it is the presence of the Sibylla in this very area that mitigates these mysterious appearances, as her priestesses constantly perform rites of protection and exorcisms known only to them.

In spite of these evident dangers, there is always some unfortunate soul who chooses to delve into the grove around the lake, or even take a boat and venture off of the banks. Many seek the Golden Bough (see page 179), wishing to perform the rites of powerful forbidden magic it is rumored to grant access to. Such foolishness, however, is often met with its rightful reward; our patrols frequently find only the boat, ditched on the banks, or blackened scraps of clothing - never a corpse.

CERBERUS, GUARDIAN OF THE INFERNAL GATES

Cerberus
Value: DV12
1 die: Damage
2 dice: De Bello, Hit Points
3 dice: De Corpore, Sensibilitas
Hit Points: 24
Protections: Monstrous hide (Protection 4)

- *Special Abilities:* Acute Senses, Grab, Poison* (1DV)
- *Magic Powers:* Immortality, Multiple Heads (3), Terror (1DV, the victim must hear Cerberus)

** If he attacks during a combat tempus, Cerberus can attack with his serpent tail (DV6 instead of DV12). If he inflicts at least 1 point of damage, he injects his poison. When fighting against multiple opponents, Cerberus can use this attack against only one target each tempus (usually the weakest or least protected).*

Cerberus is the giant, three-headed infernal hound that watches over the entrance to Hades, and, as such, is said to dwell in the depths of the caves on Lake Avernus. Pluto placed him there to ensure that nobody leaves, not just to prevent outsiders from entering the Underworld. The few capable of eluding his watch had to put him to sleep, such as the great musician and poet Orpheus, with his divine music, and Aeneas and Sibylla, when the prophetess gave the infernal hound a honey and sleep herbs cake.

Cerberus is part of a monstrous and divine clan, son of Typhoeus and Echidna, and brother to Chimera, the Sphinx, and the Hydra. Of his father, lord of storms, Cerberus has the voice, his three heads constantly howling with the roar of thunder rather than the bark of a dog. From his mother, terrible serpent-legged Echidna, he inherited the black mane around his neck, made of snakes, and the serpent tail.

MAIN ITALIC SANCTUARIES

Italia has always enjoyed the favor of the gods, and its grateful peoples have built numerous magnificent shrines. Some of them host renowned oracles that, since the most ancient times, have spread the divine word.
I shall here endeavor here to present a list of the sacred places in Italia, attended by pilgrims from all over the peninsula and beyond. Many of them have become reference points for the Empire, and, naturally, minor but not less important cults have blossomed, often hidden from superficial glances.

JUPITER ANXUR OF TARRACINA

Sixty-two miles to the south of Rome, on the Via Appia, is the mountain that blocks the path to Campania Felix. It is Mons Jovis, the Mount of Jupiter, a spur of rock that extends inland from the Ausoni Mountains and overlooks the sea, where the most magnificent Italic sanctuary to the father of the gods is located.

It is said that this is among the most ancient sanctuaries in Italia, founded by the Laestrygonian Giants, its mighty walls a work beyond human hands. The structures were strengthened and modified multiple times throughout the centuries, and the peculiarity of this sanctuary is the god it is dedicated to. It is not, in fact, Jupiter as we are used to knowing him, the austere and grand father of the gods, but the child Jupiter. The title of "*anxur*" seems to come from an ancient word which should mean "beardless".

THE THREEFOLD SHRINE

The sacred area dedicated to Jupiter Anxur is made up of three sections, each on a monumental terrace:

- **Entrenched camp.** This occupies the highest part of the plateau and, rather than a sacred building, is a military installation. The esplanade features a three-sided porch, slightly reminiscent of the typical structure of a castra, with a large central square where the troops gather or train. On the back of the porch, in view of the mountain, the structure is defended by a wall with nine guard towers. The entrenched camp protects the middle terrace, the one with the main temple of the sacred area, connected to the one below by steps dug into the side of the mountain.
- **Middle terrace**. The main body of the sacred compound, ancient legends say that from this square Ulysses saw in the distance the isle of Aeaea, realm of the witch Circe. At its center is the magnificent temple of Jupiter, oriented north-south according to the sacred alignment of the *templum*, perpendicular to the terrace. The temple is spectacular, for it stands on a tall podium that can be reached only via a monumental staircase, halfway along which is an altar, decorated with elegant Ionic columns, although not the most sacred part of the shrine. Those who admire the facade, in fact, notice on the right a shrine borne by marble columns, open on four sides. Beneath it is the great rock through which the god gives his oracles, and, on the back of the great temple, a long porch hides the many galleries that open into the mountain and connect the temple to the military installation above and to the lower terrace.
- **Lower terrace.** This is the main structure of the sanctuary, built in most ancient times and then kept with great care. A series of galleries that dig into the side of the mountain, the outer facade is divided by twelve archways opening to the sea, lit at night, and a wonderful view for those coming to the shrine by ship.

THE ORACULAR ROCK

This sanctuary hosts a peculiar oracle, its responses given by a sacred stone, a rock spike that juts from the very roots of the mountain and crosses all the manmade structures of the terraces until it surfaces right beside the temple of Jupiter. It is older than the temple, and the odd position of the structure was necessary in order to build the whole terrace around the rock, ignoring the celestial alignment. Twice the height of a man, the rock stands below the small open temple, for it must take air from all the currents rising from the sea or descending from the mountain. It is criss-crossed with small cavities, a sponge-like structure where the divine breath, the *pneuma*, flows from an opening called *chasma*, a rock mouth of sorts. The movement of pneuma inside the rock whispers, hisses, and intones obscure melodies that only the priests of the god, the Cultores Jovis Axorani, know how to interpret. In cases of great danger, it is the Flamen of Jupiter himself who comes from Rome specifically to hear the oracles of the stone of Anxur.

SANCTUARY OF JUPITER ANXUR – ENCOUNTERS TABLE

Roll 1d10 when appropriate.

D10 Roll	Event
1	**Tornado.** A whirlwind from the lake draws ever closer, moving through the shrine. It does not damage buildings or things, but the Custodes may lose small, unsecured items. Many bystanders interpret it as a divine sign, but do not agree on its meaning.
2	**A new hope.** A wealthy landowner has consulted the oracle and has just learned that foreigners will break the curse on his nearby farm. Since the Custodes are the first people he meets after the oracle, he is convinced they are the ones mentioned by the prediction and will do anything to convince them to help him, promising great rewards. He says that a supernatural creature moves through the closed doors of his stables and hen houses, butchering his animals. The truth is that it is an Amphisbaena (see page 198) living nearby, moving at nighttime through small cracks in the walls.
3	**A sign from the sky?** An eagle flies over the shrine, headed west, to the open sea. It then passes a second and a third time, always headed to the sea. However, those who interpret it as a divine sign are wrong; it is just a bird on the hunt, circling from above as it looks for prey. Attacking it would draw the ire of the faithful, as eagles are sacred to Jupiter.
4	**Thief!** A man in the crowd of the faithful screams that he has been robbed of his belt pouch, just as the cutpurse is running for the exit. Just another robbery, as often happens in crowded spaces. If the loot is recovered, the robbed man, wealthy owner of a nearby pottery workshop, offers a reward of some kind to those who have helped him.
5	**The poor girl.** Domitilla, a young and evidently pregnant woman, is accompanied to the shrine by her parents and her brother, who are loudly berating her. Her father suddenly strikes her, and the Custodes can intervene, if they want to. If they are successful in convincing the family to allow Domitilla to tell her story, the girl says she was visited by an Incubus against her will, becoming pregnant. It is the truth, but her relatives do not believe her. However, they are here to invoke divine protection for her nonetheless.
6	**Possessed?** Among the crowd visiting the shrine, a beautiful woman with finely crafted jewelry is suddenly wracked with convulsions, her eyes rolling back in her head, and passes out, stone cold and shivering. The other bystanders take a few steps back. If the Custodes approach the scene, the woman addresses them with deep, rumbling voice, saying something useful for their current task (the exact content of what she says are left to the Demiurge). She is then shaken by a stronger convulsion and wakes up, without any memory of what just happened.
7	**The procession of the survivors.** A group of bearded and sun-scorched men, their hair and beards caked with salt, is headed to the shrine. They are local sailors who recently survived a shipwreck, there to thank Jupiter for answering their invocations and placating the storm that would have killed them. They are in a good mood, and bring small replicas of oars, anchors, and ships to offer to the temple.
8	**A miraculous remedy.** The characters spot in the crowd a woman who accosts the diseased and the crippled to offer them a powerful medicinal herb that, she claims, has even healed a family from the plague, asking a massive 20 sestertii per dose. It is the prodigious *moly* (see page 182) she found in the orchard of her recently deceased mother. The plant has withered, and now the woman has only two doses left, which she intends to sell for a great price.

9	**The son.** The Custodes spot a couple about to argue. The man is dragging his pregnant wife by the elbow to the temple, for a sacrifice to child Jupiter to have the son he has wanted for such a long time, after three daughters. The woman, however, would not mind another daughter. If they intervene, the Custodes can prevent or de-escalate an argument about to end in violence. In four months, whatever the group decides to do, will be born Camilla, a beautiful girl who her father will love greatly.
10	**The blessing.** A Custos sees a struggling old priest. He is climbing a staircase, but his legs shake and he stumbles. If nobody intervenes, after a few steps he falls to the ground. If, instead, somebody helps him reach the top of the staircase, the priest mutters a small blessing, restoring 1d3 Pietas each to the group.

HERCULES VICTOR OF TIBUR

This sanctuary is dedicated to Hercules Victor, protector of traders, cattle migrations, and salt, the most precious commodity shipped to Rome from the Hadriaticus coast. The shrine rises on the Via Tiburtina Valeria, which from Rome leads to the city of Tibur, and from there moves into Samnium. It was built over the only ford on the Anio river, so the road that connects Rome to the Mare Adriaticum passes right through there. The consecrated area covers a segment of the Via Tiburtina Valeria and the bed of the river just before the waterfall.

A LIGHTHOUSE ON LAND

The sanctuary of Hercules Victor is the largest in Latium, not only an important religious center, but also a monument to wealth and the ingenuity of man. All the trade caravans from the Tirrhenic coast to the others and back must pass through here.

The sanctuary rises on a plateau from which the Anio river falls into a waterfall toward the valley, such a majestic location that the roof of the temple, painted in golden yellow, is visible for a long distance in the surrounding region. Lit by the sun or the night torches, it can be seen even as far away as Rome, and provides a point of reference for travelers, much like a lighthouse for ships.

Unlike the other shrines in Latium, this one is built on one wide terrace, borne by a series of overlapping archways, five on the steepest side to the river and two on the other. The main buildings are:

- **Temple of Hercules.** Of truly exceptional size, with a facade 120 feet wide and 195 long for 75 feet of height, it appears even taller because it was built on a rise almost as tall as the building itself. On either sideof it are two fountains set in semicircular niches, where pilgrims can drink and wash.
- **Perimeter porch.** The temple is surrounded by an enormous, three-sided porch that leaves open the side overlooking they valley in the direction of Rome. It has two floors, and it hosts dwellings, sanctuary administration offices, halls for events, and so on. Emperor Augustus often used this building as a tribunal, where he personally took part in the judicial proceedings.
- **Open theater.** In front of the staircase to the temple is the semicircle of the theater ordered by the Divine Augustus. Carved out of the hill, it has a diameter of 180 feet and can contain up to three thousand six hundred spectators. Plays are held at any time but the heart of winter, and are usually centered around the deeds of Hercules.
- **Via tecta.** On the left side of the great structure that bears the terrace opens a wide gallery that crosses the entire extension of the shrine. This is the covered segment of the Via Tiburtina.

THE MYSTERY OF THE SIBYLLA TIBURTINA

I must point out the unusual case of the Sibylla Tiburtina. Usually, the shrines where a prophetess like a Sibylla lives are much attended, but in this instance such a prophetess of ancient tradition was entirely forgotten, and only a select few remember her name. Today, there is no seer in the shrine, and pilgrims go there only to pray to Hercules. Some scholars even deny there has ever been a prophetess here and claim the name "Sibylla Tiburtina" is a fabrication of writers with too much fantasy.

In fact, the Sibylla Tiburtina seems to be mentioned only in one writing of the ancient erudite Marcus Terentius Varo, in the days of Julius Caesar. It is also said, although there is no evidence backing this claim, that the Divine Augustus met her.

This could simply be dismissed as one of the many legends that almost every shrine claims to have or have had a farseer, however it is important to establish whether this Sibylla has actually ever existed. To her is attributed an unnerving prophecy that seems to point to the end of time with great accuracy, a list of the Emperors that will sit on the throne to the end of the world. The prophecy also would specify in great detail a series of supernatural signs of the coming of the "Ninth Era", the last one in which men will live on this earth.

Our lord Theodomirus, aware of this time of change we are living in and worried by the signs he observed himself, has tasked his most loyal collaborators to find the Sibylla Tiburtina, if she even exists, to hear her advice. Alternatively, he wishes to at least recover the text of this fearsome prophecy in order to study it.

VARO'S CATALOG OF THE SIBYLLAE

The erudite Marcus Terentius Varo, contemporary of Julius Caesar, left us a list of ten "true" Sibyllae. In origin, the title of Sibylla was only for the prophetesses of Apollo, directly inspired by him with prophetic visions in his name. As centuries passed, however, the term took a more generic meaning of women capable of formulating prophecies, growing beyond measure until the time of Varo, when the title was often used by impostors and charlatans. He set out, with great precision, to analyze all the documents claiming the existence of the prophetesses of Apollo in the world that he could find, and, scouring such sources, he attempted to weed out the impostors and ensure the identification of the genuine farseers. The result is a list of ten confirmed names:

- **Persica.** Perhaps the most ancient, she was a seer who lived in the ancient city of Babylonia, in Persia. She is thought to have foreseen the great deeds of Alexander the Great and to have enjoyed great fame in the ancient world, although when the troops of Rome conquered Babylonia they found neither her nor her memory.
- **Libyca**. According to the Greek historian Pausania, this is the most ancient Sibylla, thought to be the one granting prophecies at the oracle of Ammon, in the desert between Egypt and Libya. For numerous centuries, however, no prophetess has lived in that shrine, and the prophecies are entrusted to an oracular stone.
- **Delphica.** The most famous, she still lives in the shrine of Apollo at Delphi and was already active before the Trojan War.
- **Cimmeria.** About this prophetess is still much uncertainty. Her name is believed to be due to the Italic Cimmerians, who lived around the Avernus Lake in ancient times. However, that has always been under the control of the Sibylla Cumana, so perhaps her location was somewhere else. Some supposed she lived in the fateful cave of the Lupercal in Rome, others in the mythical land of the northern Cimmerians, where the sun disappears in winter for many months.
- **Erythrea.** The monicker of this prophetess seems to place her in the Greek city of Erythrae, on the Asian coast, although presently we do not know of a shrine there. It is said this prophetess gave her prophecies by giving a number of verses to those who asked for a response, who often attempted to interpret them without success. The answer, in fact, was another, obtained by reading the initial letter of the verses, in the order they were provided, composing one or more words.
- **Samia.** According to Varo, this seer lived in the isle of Samo, in Achaia, in the temple of the goddess Hera, Greek Juno. Like the Sibylla Cumana, she is said to have lived in a cave, the same where for a while stayed the philosopher Pythagoras. Today that cave is of difficult identification, and the temple of Hera does not house any oracle.
- **Cumana.** Alongside the Delphica, this is the best-known Sibylla in the world. Such is the importance of this seer in the entire province of Italia and beyond that I have dedicated to her a specific section (see page 81).
- **Ellespontina.** She owes her monicker to the Hellespont strait, where the prophetess is claimed to have lived. It is said she was the author of part of the texts in the Sibylline Books that were offered to the fifth king of Rome, Tarquinius Priscus.
- **Frigia.** The attribution of this seer is confused. There have been those who claimed she is none other than Cassandra, the unfortunate daughter of the Trojan king Priamus, cursed not to ever be believed. If that were true, she would have disappeared many centuries ago, unless the god Apollo has eventually intervened to save her from oblivion.
- **Tiburtina.** She is the last Sibylla, the one supposed to live in the sanctuary of Hercules Victor in Tibur.

Unfortunately, from the time of Varo to the present day, six centuries have passed, and things have changed much. Of numerous seers on this list we have lost track, and others are today held in great regard, like that of Thracia. Many are calling for another revision, and it is not to be excluded that the College of the Pontifices may entrust this task to a group of experts from every corner of the Empire.

SANCTUARY OF HERCULES VICTOR – ENCOUNTERS TABLE

Roll 1d10 whenever appropriate.

D10 Roll	Event
1-3	**Bad weather.** The sky darkens all of a sudden, and it starts raining, growing stronger by the minute. Bystanders clear the area in a hurry to return to their homes.
4	**On the trail of the Sibylla.** An elderly woman approaches an isolated pilgrim, a middle-aged trader, speaking in a hushed voice, offering to accompany him to the ancient Sibylla in a nearby cave, for only a few to interrogate. The two then leave. However, it is an ambush; the old woman leads the unwary victim to a cave where bandits wait him.
5	**A deal.** A poor-looking girl offers the Custodes an old amulet for but a few coins, a minuscule metal figure of a hydra affixed to an armband by thin chains. She says her father, a veteran of the Eastern campaigns, believed it to be a powerful ward against enemy attacks, and it actually works. Anyone struck while wearing the amulet suffers 1d3 less points of damage (the effect is applied after the armor protection roll). Its power, however, is fading; after its third use, the amulet crumbles into dust.
6	**An unusual omen.** On the balcony of the temple lands a Pica (see page 198), who addresses the Custodes with a faint voice, *"Nevermore! Nevermore! Nevermore!"*, before flying away. To the Demiurge deciding whether the animal is too difficult to chase, or the beginning of a collateral adventure, he is repeating a sentence he heard where a tragedy is about to occur.
7	**The Sibylla herself.** The Custodes spot in a secluded corner an aging woman, her arms raised and her gaze staring into the void, murmuring arcane words as she invites the god to visit her for another prophecy. If asked, she claims to be just an actress rehearsing a monologue for a future play she wishes to propose to the theater of the shrine, but her interpretation is truly impressive, too much to dispel the doubt that she actually is a seer or a Sibylla. If, instead, she is observed from a distance, after a while she leaves and fades into the crowd.
8	**The procession of the veterans.** The Custodes see incoming a group of aging men headed to pay homage to the god. They are veterans of a campaign at the borders of the Empire who survived numerous battles and have gathered here to thank Hercules Victor to honor an oath. The men crack rude jokes among themselves, sharing anecdotes of military life and inside jokes only they can understand.
9	**The seer at the mirror.** A woman dressed in Eastern clothes sits in a corner of the shrine, and for a coin offers bystanders a look into her supposedly magical metal mirror to see the future. She is charlatan who always gives rather vague answers, seeing a journey, an incoming missive, or the presence of a suspiciously nondescript woman...
10	**The magical shield.** Among the ex voto in the temple stands out a bronze, magical shield that, according to its inscription, was gifted to the god two centuries before. It is a bronze knightly Clipeus of stunning make (Parry +3), shining as if it had been just forged. To obtain it, the group must succeed in a mission for the priests, while taking it otherwise causes the hostility of the gods until the sacrilege is remedied.

FORTUNA PRIMIGENIA OF PRAENESTE

Along the Via Praenestina, 27 miles from the Urbs, is Praeneste, a most ancient religious center, still to this day attended by the people of Latium.

Here is a sanctuary dedicated to the goddess Fortuna, called Primigenia, being considered the power everything in the world descends from. The people of Latium held her to be the mother of the gods and humankind, and her shrine is also the seat of a famous oracle, whose responses are called *Sortes Praenestinae*.

THE SACRED HILL

Those who have never visited this sacred place are often struck with awe when they see it for the first time. It is an enormous complex set in the side of a hill, spread over six artificial terraces, decorated with a breathtaking use of space and full, giant walls, porches, and columns. Instead of hugging the side of the hill, the entire structure reaches upwards, and the eye of the onlooker is rapt by the skilled geometries, ever attracted to the peak of the temple. Its walls are enormous stone blocks, locked one with the other so precisely they defy the skill of human hand, hence called "Cyclopean".

A flight of magnificent stairs connects the terraces together with the summit of the complex, each with a specific use:

- **First terrace.** This is the link to the Forum of Praeneste. From each of the two ends of the Forum square rise a covered staircase leading to the first two terraces. The first one is entirely taken up by a wide enclosed space, lit by a large central arch and favored by travelers for resting. The priests let pilgrims who cannot afford lodging spend the night here, sheltered from the elements.
- **Second terrace.** This features pools of pure water, used by pilgrims and visitors for their necessary ablutions and cleansing before seeing the oracle.
- **Third terrace.** Accessible only by the staff of the shrine, it houses the offices, warehouses, and lodging of the lay personnel.
- **Fourth terrace.** The heart of the shrine, this is where sits the oracle. It is open to the side of the hill, with a porch decorated with Ionic columns, golden coffered ceilings, and niches in the walls bearing statues and other works of art. At its center is the sacred enclosure where the sortes are kept. Visitors are admitted one at a time to ask for a prediction.
- **Fifth terrace.** This one, too, is lavishly decorated, and opens on a central series of columns that run along its sides. More akin to a royal palace than a religious building, it is designed to hold official gatherings and special ceremonies, and it is here that the Emperor is housed when he visits the temple to pay homage to Fortuna and consult the sortes.
- **Sixth terrace.** The most sacred place of the shrine, the monumental temple of the goddess Fortuna is a wide, horseshoe-shaped colonnade with a large niche at its center, hosting the statue of the goddess Fortuna, bearing infant Jupiter and Juno. On the back of the niche is a well-hidden door that grants access to a network of corridors, dug into the natural rock, allowing the priests and others to move unseen about the complex.

THE SORTES PRAENESTINAE

The shrine of Praeneste is famous for its oracle, which does not speak through a seer, but the sortes, prophetic sentences written on wooden tablets in an ancient language, complex to read and interpret, requiring priestly help.

Whoever wishes to query the oracle of Fortuna must first undergo a cleansing ritual in the second terrace and then pay a fee based on their wealth. They are then admitted into the sacred enclosure of the fourth terrace, which holds the Arca Praenestina, a chest made of sacred olive wood containing the sortes.

The visitor writes their question on a wooden tablet, then burns it on a consecrated flame and opens the chest without touching the sortes, which are drawn by a child. He is called *Jupiter Puer* or *Jupiter Arcanus*, "Jupiter Warden of the Chest" and represents infant Jupiter. The child, then, hands the sortes to the priests for interpretation.

SANCTUARY OF FORTUNA PRIMIGENIA – ENCOUNTERS TABLE

Roll 1d10 whenever appropriate.

D10 Roll	Event
1	**Miraculous water.** A woman dressed like a priestess moves through the crowd of pilgrims, selling small terracotta bottles at a steep price. She claims they contain magical water from a secret spring of the shrine, capable of granting one wish to those who drink it. She is not a priestess, but a cunning charlatan, as her water comes from the cleansing pools of the shrine. It is tasty and fresh, but nothing more...
2	**Solemn procession.** A crowd is forming in the main town square, headed to the shrine. It is mostly made up of women, many of whom have sick children, and it presents the grim sight of numerous deformed or gravely ill infants.
3	**Man wanted.** A group of young, not particularly attractive, but rather sharp-witted girls is headed to the shrine, looking for husbands. In spite of their main goal, they are easily enticed into short but intense adventures. Their families, on the other hand, could cause the group no shortage of problems.
4	**Crying mother.** The characters stumble into a desperate woman. Her husband was horribly killed in a grove right outside Praeneste two nights before, and her four-year-old son, though spared the fate of the father, has behaved unnaturally ever since. He screams, tears his clothes, claws at others, and bites. The woman hopes for the help and counsel of the goddess. However, her husband was actually killed by a Versipellis, his curse spreading to the child. To save him, the dangerous lycanthrope must die, and the child must be cleansed.
5	**The poor girl.** Placidia, a young, visibly pregnant woman, is being led to the shrine by her parents and older sister, who are loudly berating her. As the Custodes spot the small group, her father starts threatening to beat her. The characters can intervene if they wish, and, if they are successful in convincing the family to tell her story, the girl says she was visited by an Incubus against her will, becoming pregnant. Her parents are skeptical, but in doubt, they are here to invoke divine protection for her. The truth is that the son she is carrying is that of a baker's boy she spent time with behind her parents' backs. Since they did not like him, she made up the lie of the Incubus.
6	**Lucky potion**. An old woman wanders among the pilgrims, offering small packets of herbs with a pungent smell. She claims the tea made with these herbs is a boon for one's luck, which is at the same time both true and false. The herbs relieve stress and increase self-confidence, so those who drink them are more likely to be successful in what they do because they are less worried by failure. A true stroke of luck, right?!
7	**The aging priest.** An elderly priest has been assigned to assist a high-ranking official living in the luxury apartments of the fifth terrace. The nobleman does not intend to mingle with the crowd for his cleansing, and so ordered the old man to have two buckets of water from the second terrace brought to his chambers. The priest, however, cannot carry such a weight for so many steps, and could use some help...

8	**The sacred child.** Inside the shrine, the child tasked with drawing the sortes looks at the Custos with the highest Sensibilitas score. If the character moves closer, the child draws a tablet from a box made of sacred honey-exuding olive wood, bearing a prophecy seemingly concerning exactly what the Custodes are doing or about to do (the exact content is at the discretion of the Demiurge).
9	**Divine milk.** If the Custodes approach the monumental statue of Fortuna, portraying the goddess breastfeeding child Jupiter and Juno, on a successful **Sensibilitas** roll (DT 6), they realize that from the breasts of the goddess drips milk. If the characters gather the liquid without being noticed, they can save it for later. Once ingested, in addition to having an amazing taste, it restores 1d3 Pietas. If, instead, they do not act quickly, or are spotted, others see the miracle and within a few hours the shrine fills with all manner of people and charlatans, its fame spreading to every corner of the Italic land.
10	**The gift.** A Custos sees a woman sitting far from the main crowd, holding a bouquet of magnificent roses. If approached, she says nothing, but gives the group one of her roses, only to vanish mysteriously just one moment later. The rose, if held during a Divination ritual, lowers its difficulty by 1 level, then loses its power and withers.

JUPITER APPENNINUS, FATHER OF THE PEAKS

On the Via Flaminia, 135 miles from Rome, where the road emerges from the Appenine Mountains, is an ancient sanctuary dedicated to Jupiter "Father of the Peaks", Jupiter Appenninus or Penninus. It is not far from the town of Iguvium, but the harshness of the mountain trails makes reaching the shrine quite difficult.

Right beside the shrine is also a post station under the control of our troops, for both public and secret reasons, which offers shelter and rest. The public reason is that this is an important mountain pass on the Via Flaminia, connecting the two Italic coasts, and it must be kept in working order for travelers and military convoys. However, the lesser-known reason is the need to keep the abnormal presence of wolves at bay; it is even said that here dwell particular wolves, more dangerous than the normal ones and somehow "supernatural" (see page 198).

The sanctuary is made of one small, almost fortified, stern-looking temple, as befits a mountain place of worship. It is surrounded by a stone and wood fence, lit by torches day and night. The lights guide pilgrims and travelers to the shrine and the mountain pass, both in the darkness of the night and during storms, keeping the wolves at bay. Since it snows here often, inside the fence is a building that offers shelter and a modicum of heat to those caught by surprise by the weather or feral beasts.

THE GRABOVIA TRIAD

The sanctuary rises in an area once inhabited by ancient people, rumors claiming that the first local place of worship was founded by the very Aborigines, consisting of three altars dedicated to a mysterious divine triad about whom we know nothing. It is only in some dilapidated documents kept by the Augurs that we could find the name of the gods, *Grabovi*, with not much more detail. Two of theses deities were gradually assimilated into better-known gods, taking the names of Jupiter Grabovius and Mars Grabovius. Of the third god, Vofio Grabovius, we only know the name.

Their three altars still survive inside the fence of the shrine, and are honored with sacrifices and ritual fires. The priests and local shepherds do not wish to disrespect the ancient gods, even if they barely know their names.

THE SORTES PENNINAE

The sanctuary, though secluded, enjoys some fame due to the quality of its prophecies, the *Sortes Penninae*. It is here that the Divine Aurelianus came to ask if it was proper to build a statue to the Sun God in Rome, other Emperors taking his example and praying to Jupiter Appenninus.

The oracle is delivered through Jupiter's thunder. Inside the temple is a natural rock room where benign thunder booms, never followed by lightning, as Jupiter here restrains his great power to only make his thunderous voice heard. The visitor kneels in front of a crack in the rock and asks their question, and the god gives his answer.

Throughout the centuries, some predictions were written on bronze tablets kept in Iguvium and are consulted by the town magistrates for matters of local security.

SANCTUARY OF JUPITER APPENNINUS – ENCOUNTERS TABLE

Roll 1d10 whenever appropriate.

D10 Roll	Event
1-3	**Bad weather.** Mountain weather is known to change often! In but an instant, the group is enshrouded in a snow or sleet storm (depending on the season), unless they pass a **De Natura** roll (DT 3, 6, or 9, depending upon whether the roll result on this table was 1, 2, or 3, respectively).
4	**The threat in the mountains.** An exhausted shepherd comes to the temple, asking for the help from the priests. His herd was routed and partially exterminated by a Chimera of Arretium (see page 201) out of the woods. The monster is still wandering around his hut, but the priests ask the Custodes, who they believe can better help the man, for aid.
5	**Wolf! Wolf!** The Custodes hear somebody scream from the grove near the shrine: *"Wolf! Wolf!"* If they move in to help, the cry moves further into the trees. On a successful **Sensibilitas** roll (DT 9), a Custos spots a Pica (see page 198) screaming to ensure being seen before flying away with a leering laugh. If they fail the roll, the group can repeat it later.
6	**The magical herd.** A shepherd is passing by with a herd of unparalleled beauty. A successful **De Natura** roll (DT 6) proves it definitely is not normal. All the animals are extremely healthy and clean, their wool is soft, almost glowing, and their udders seem about to burst with milk. The shepherd, an uncouth and vulgar peasant, is not even aware of his great fortune. Unbeknownst to him, the water his animals drink on a rather steep side of a nearby mountain has caused this transformation, an enchanted spring that has the effects listed in the *Magical Springs Table* (see page 108).
7	**The shepherd procession**. A silent procession of shepherds and locals is headed to the shrine, bringing an enormous wolf skin in tribute and thanks for being successful in killing the beast that caused great damage to both men and animals. With them is a large and dark man, dressed and armed as a warrior, a Hunter of the Lucani (see page 105), who moved into the area a couple of years before and has served the local communities well.
8	**The medal of the faithful**. The Custodes spot on the ground a cord with a silver medal, darkened by time. It portrays a wolf and an eagle on one side, and a cloud with lightning bolts on the other. If the group attempts to find its owner, they learn it belongs to an old man, who thanks them wholeheartedly. If they choose to keep it, whomever has it on their person feels clouded by a bad feeling, and the difficulty of any Divination ritual increases by 1 level if they are present, until the medallion is either brought back to its owner or offered to Jupiter at a temple dedicated to him.
9	**The salt merchants.** The Custodes hear two traders chatting about their purchases as they wait their turn at the oracle. They bought an ancient Eastern sword from a veteran they met in the port of Ancona, from which they are now returning, headed to Rome. The soldier claimed it belonged to the king of the Dacians, and it has magical powers, so they want to know from the oracle if his words are true. The sword turns out not to be magical, but still of extraordinary make (as an Ensis with Damage 10 instead of 8; its Difficulty remains the same), even though it did not belong to a monarch, but a famous general. The two merchants are willing to let it go only for a hefty sum, or for something of equally great value.
10	**The sacred eagle.** A white eagle circles down to the temple, as everybody stares at it in reverence. It grasps in its claws an item dear to one of the Custodes, and then leaves. The Custos may take the item back from the eagle with a successful **Coordinatio** or **De Corpore** roll (DT 9) roll, but the animal is sacred to Jupiter, and if they harm it in any way they commit a sacrilege that immediately loses them the favor of their god.

HERA ARGIVA ON THE RIVER SILARUS

I shall mention now the Heraion, a forgotten but equally important shrine, a sacred space dedicated to the Greek goddess Hera. The legends attribute its foundation to the Greek hero Jason, when he passed by the Italic coast on his way back from the quest for the Golden Fleece. Because the deed was performed while sailing on the *Argos*, the goddess to whom the shrine was consecrated was called "Hera Argiva". Whether this is only a legend, however, is unknown, although the Greek origins of the temple are not in question.

The shrine rose where the Silarus River flows into the sea, just under six miles north of modern-day Paestum. Before the advent of Rome, this was a key border between the Etruscan regions to the north of the river and the Greek ones to its south. The presence of the goddess prevented clashes between the two populations, while the healthiness of the place encouraged everyone to enjoy the beauty of the territory instead of destroying it with war. The shrine ruled over earth, sea, and river.

THE WATER LABYRINTH

Unfortunately, the location of the shrine proved to be not as practical as it was politically ideal. The peculiar interaction of the sea currents and the detritus moved in by the Silarus caused the coast line to advance, turning the land between the shrine and the sea into a swamp. There was an attempt to dig drainage canals, but the area was raided by Cilician pirates, then struck by an earthquake in 810 AUC, and its fate eventually sealed by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, whose ashes buried the temple and the surrounding buildings forever.

Today, almost nobody knows how to reach the shrine, lost beneath a maze of water. It is impossible to move there on horseback, as when they sink in the mud they often break their legs upon being dragged back out. Movement on foot is made equally complex by widespread quicksand, so the locals use flat-keeled boats. propelled with stakes instead of paddles. To keep one's heading in that maze is extremely difficult, even with proper vessels, and the local inhabitants are not willing to help as guides. They claim the area is haunted, and to hear the sounds of cymbals and other sacred instruments spreading in the mists, or the voices of those who have defied the silence of the goddess and died screaming.

THE LEGEND OF THE GOLDEN FLEECE

The "Golden Fleece" is the skin of a fabled golden ram named Chrysomallos. Sent by the nymph Nefele to save her children Phrixus and Helle, who were about to be killed by the new wife of their father, this ram could fly and understand the tongues of men. He brought the children back to Colchis, in the furthest reaches of the Pontus Euxinus, but during the flight, alas, Helle fell in the waters later named Hellespont. Phrixus reached Colchis, ruled by Aeëtes, brother of the witch Circe, father of Medea, and a sorcerer himself. Instructed by Chrysomallos himself, Phrixus sacrificed the ram to Jupiter and gifted his pelt to king Aeëtes, and the father of the gods then turned Chrysomallos into a constellation. The king then tied the golden pelt to a tree consecrated to Mars and had a dragon placed to watch over it, for the sacred pelt could heal all illnesses.

Years later, the Greek hero Jason embarked on the legendary quest for the Golden Fleece, sailing on a ship named *Argos* with his companions, forever known as *Argonauts*, "the sailors of the *Argos*". Through numerous adventures, they made their way to Colchis and took the precious pelt from King Aeëtes. Jason, however, was successful in his endeavor only because the princess witch, Medea, fell in love with him and helped him with her magical arts, in exchange for which Jason married her and took her with him. The return journey proved to be even harder, as the ship touched numerous remote places, pushed by hostile gods. Some claim it landed on the Italic coasts, too, where Jason founded the temple of Hera Argiva, seeking her favor.

Only with the help of Medea did the hero return to Corynthos, but this union brought only misfortune. Once home, Jason repudiated Medea in favor of a new spouse, who was poisoned by the witch soon after. Medea then killed the children she had from Jason and fled on a flying chariot pulled by dragons, sent by her father. So Jason, persecuted by the gods for breaking his vows to Medea, died alone on the bridge of the *Argos*, now just a wreck.

THE SACRED PEPLUM OF THE GODDESS

There are, however, always those who wish to find the ancient shrine (and usually it does not end well!). It is, in fact, said that here once were woven special cloths, infused with magical powers from none other than the Golden Fleece itself, the legends claiming that Jason gifted the first priestesses of the newborn temple a piece of the magical skin after founding the shrine. They took a few strands of hair from it and wove them into the cloth with which they made the vestments for the statue, supposedly gifting all the ritual robes dedicated to the goddess with a spark of magic. Those fabrics, famous for their faint golden glow in the dark, are rumored to still be kept underground below the temple of Hera, although there is no evidence that this is true. What is known is that while the shrine still existed, the goddess was celebrated yearly with the offering of a new peplum, woven with great skill by her priestesses. The offer and the dressing of the statue were accompanied by a cheerful procession attended by the whole population, singing and throwing petals. The peplum of the previous year was devoutly conserved, enriching the treasure of the shrine with hundreds of such garments. Of them, whether they were actually magical or not, we know nothing.

SANCTUARY OF HERA ARGIVA – ENCOUNTERS TABLE

Roll 1d10 whenever appropriate.

D10 Roll	Event
1	**Quicksand**. The Custos with the lowest De Natura score (determine randomly in case of a tie) is trapped in quicksand. To break free, they must pass a **De Corpore** or **Vigor** roll (DT 9), but on each failure they suffer 1d3 points of damage (ignoring armor). A helper reduces the difficulty of the roll to 6, or to 3 if more than one, but the helper(s) must then pass a **Coordinatio** or **De Corpore** roll (DT 6) or be trapped also.
2	**The unlucky traveler.** A skeleton on the ground wears the remains of a short tunic and a belt with a satchel containing a few coins. A short distance away is a wooden box slightly larger than the palm of a hand. Inside it is only a large spider and its nest, as well as the remains of some herb or long-evaporated spice.
3	**Stopping by a shrine.** The Custodes spot in the underbrush a small sacred shrine with an empty niche. If they stop by to have a closer look, they also notice a small statue of the goddess Hera on the ground, covered in mud. If they clean it and place back in its place, the goddess blesses them, and they can roll **De Magia** to recover Pietas (see *Recovering Pietas* on page 79 of the Core Rulebook, DT 3 instead of 6).
4	**The mysterious maiden.** A lovely maiden wearing an extremely short tunic appears from the bushes, before immediately disappearing. If the Custodes were respectful of nature, nothing happens for the moment; however, she may make another appearance later if they damage trees or plants. If they do, the girl, a Nymph, lures the Custodes into a patch of quicksand, where those who fail a **De Natura** or **Sensibilitas** roll (DT 9) are trapped (for the specific rules, see *1 – Quicksan*d above).
5	**A strange meeting**. On an apple tree in the middle of the swamps sits an old man, his hair and beard long and coarse, dressed in tatters. He has been living for many long years as a hermit, feeding on fruit, berries, mushrooms, and snails, and his mind has lost much of its old sharpness. However, occasionally supernatural entities possess him. If the Custodes treat him well, he mutters some prophetic sentence on what the group is doing or about to do (the exact content is left to the Demiurge), although he has no idea what he is saying.
6	**Magical water.** A **Sensibilitas** roll (DT 6) allows noticing that a small spring, seemingly flowing from the rocks, instead flows from a shining copper tube. The surrounding rocks are carved with dancing maidens, under whose feet moss forms almost a meadow. It is an enchanted spring, and those who drink from it benefit from the effects on the *Magical Springs Table* (see page 108).

7	**The swamp creatures.** The Custodes see an enormous, dark toad emerge from the swamp waters but a few steps from them, which then croaks and catches a bug midair with its tongue. Its body and legs remain in the water, but it is as tall as an adult man. However, the creature is harmless. If unmolested, it dives again into the water within a few moments. If attacked, it dies on the first hit, exploding in a malodorous shower.
8	**Whispers in the dark.** The Custodes hear voices whispering from the bushes to stop and pay the due respects to this sacred place, any women in the group specifically hearing a bewitching melody. Among the bushes hides a Faunus, seeking to charm the group in order to lay with one of the women. If the group consists of only men, he instead attempts to pull pranks on them, such as staying hidden and suggesting they drink swamp water, claiming its magic will lend them great vigor.
9	**The danger under their sandals.** The Custodes almost step on two vipers (use the profile of Venomous Snakes in the Core Rulebook), which attempt to bite them.
10	**The ferocious stag.** An unusually large and belligerent Deer (DV10) charges the Custodes in an attempt to gore them. A **Sensibilitas** roll (DT 6) allows the group to spot a broken arrow jutting from an almost-healed wound. A Custos can try to grab the arrow shaft and extract it with a **De Corpore** roll (DT 9). If they succeed, the stag keens in pain, but calms down immediately. It lowers its head, as if thanking the Custodes, then turns and leaves, and the Custodes recover 1d3 Pietas each.

THE KEEP OF CERES

In the heart of Sicilia opens a bountiful and fertile valley, the city of Henna at its center, called by the Greek poet Kallimachus "the navel of the island" for its location and religious importance.

This place, in fact, was the theater of the kidnapping of the daughter of goddess Ceres, Proserpina, at the hands of the lord of the Underworld, Pluto, while she was picking violets. The heart of Sicilia also features a rightfully awe-inspiring pond called Pergum, the presence of such a clear body of water not fed by any river being nothing short of miraculous. Due to its circular shape and its location, it is often called "the Navel of Sicilia".

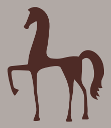
THE STONE OF THE GODDESS

Above the valley of Henna is a rocky hill, visible from many miles around, with a primitive shrine, where the ancient folk brought simple gifts to Ceres, such as flower necklaces and small copper or stone statuettes. In later days, the place was sacred to the Sicani, Siculi, and Siracusani, too, who expanded the shrine to include the entire peak of the hill, worshiping the top of the rock as if a very statue of the goddess. Do not be surprised, for such behavior is not unusual. Many people worship the Great Mother through featureless stone pillars, for they do not want to defy her by confining the boundless might of the goddess in a human shape. Even in Rome, the great mother Cybele is worshiped through a black stone.

It is said that the stone of Henna grants prophecies, sent by the goddess directly to the minds of her petitioners, foregoing the mediation of priests. This is both positive and not, for on one hand one can ask her whatever they want, but on the other it can be even harder to understand her responses than it is for oracles with trained priests. To ease their comprehension, the priests sell *kykeon*, a special potion brewed with the barley sacred to the goddess.

THE RITE OF BARLEY

The barley potion brewed in this shrine is similar to that used in Eleusis for celebrating the Eleusinian Mysteries, although, understandably, every shrine prepares it slightly differently. That of Henna is based on barley flour, water, and mint, to which are added secret herbs that help in reaching a state of sacred ecstasy and open the mind to the goddess. Whoever drinks this brew interprets more easily the visions, as it helps in relaxing and setting aside negative thoughts that could interfere with the presence of the goddess. Those who visit the Keep of Ceres for an oracle must fast for an entire day, then priests hand them a bowlful of the potion. The petitioner drinks, and then is left alone next to the sacred stone, where they wait for the goddess to grant them an oracle, which may happen after some hours.



THE GIFT OF WHEAT

Sicilia was the first place in the world, if legends are to be believed, to receive the gift of wheat from the goddess Ceres, who was grateful to this land for the help its people gave her when she was looking for her lost daughter, gentle Proserpina.

Sicilia was already blessed with flowers and plants of all colors and sweet smells, and Proserpina used to dance there since the dawn of the world. Pluto, seeing her dance among the blossoms, had fallen in love with her, deciding she would become the queen of his realm, although he feared her mother would have refused him her hand. After all, who would ever want to see her daughter relegated, even as a queen, to the depths of the dark realms? So, he kidnapped Proserpina to show her her future domain and convince her to marry him. Ceres, however, devastated by the disappearance of Proserpina, began her earnest search. For nine days, the goddess forsook her duties as the keeper of nature and the earth, crying and despairing and finding comfort only in the Sicilian people, who lit torches at night to help her in her search and sang to her during the day.

In those nine days, nothing grew or blossomed, and on the tenth day Jupiter, fearing this could lead to the end of the human race, told Ceres where her daughter was. The goddess demanded Pluto release her daughter, but unfortunately, during her few days of residence, Proserpina had eaten three seeds from a pomegranate offered by Pluto, binding herself to the Underworld, never to return to the surface. To save humankind, Jupiter ordered his brother Pluto to find an agreement with Ceres, so Proserpina was to spend six months on the surface with her mother and the other six in Hades with her husband. While she is below ground, the land withers and slumbers in the cold of winter, but when she returns to her mother, flowers bloom again, and wheat, gift of Ceres, grows, crowning the Sicilian land.

THE FLOWER OF PROSERPINA

The plain of Henna is famous for its flowers, magnificent in color and smell, although the one Proserpina brought to Hades, the asphodelus, is particularly dear to her. Saddened by the absence of her beloved flowers in the Underworld, Proserpina asked her mother to give her one that could grow in the realm of the dead, too, the asphodelus, which grew so much it eventually characterized one of the three regions of the Underworld. The realm of the dead is made up of Tartarus, a land of horrors where are chained the impious, the Elysian Fields, a luminous place for those who led a good life, and the Plains of Asphodelus, where live those who were neither virtuous nor evil.

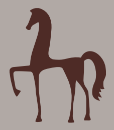
The very smell of the asphodelus of Henna induces slumber and gives oblivion, like poppy juice.

Normally, these plants do not grow in large enough numbers to put a grown man to sleep by sheer exposure, but dogs, with their much sharper sense of smell, suffer from it greatly and tend to avoid crossing its fields when in bloom. Younger shepherds, however, have been known to occasionally fall asleep while leading their sheep through blooming asphodelus fields. For that same reason, local girls never accept invitations to walks in blooming fields from boys they do not trust, to avoid the fate that befell Proserpina.

Those who know how to work asphodelus brew a mild sedative and a bland anesthetic, weaker than opium, a potion that the local physicians often use liberally, though some mix it with other substances that make it much more dangerous.

The asphodeli of Henna are usually torn up as soon as they blossom, both to prevent cattle from feeding on them and to avoid their gathering for ill intent, local law enforcement ensuring that no fugitive flees there when chased with dogs.

Unfortunately, it is not unusual for many to wander the fields at night when the flowers bloom, to pick as many as they can.



INTERPRETING PROPHECIES WITH KYKEON

Drinking kykeon requires a degree of skill, for its numerous ingredients make it an unstable brew. Barley flour, heavier than water, tends to precipitate to the bottom of the cup, requiring the petitioner to swirl its contents with a specific technique. In order to drink it, the flour must always be suspended in water. Once the liquid has a proper spin and is whirling around, it must be drunk quickly, without spilling even a single drop, to ensure a vision from Ceres.

In game terms, correctly drinking kykeon before a Divination ritual lowers the difficulty of the De Magia roll by 1 level.

KEEP OF CERES – ENCOUNTERS TABLE

Roll 1d10 whenever appropriate.

D10 Roll	Event
1	**A flower for your troubles.** A small girl sells asphodelus bouquets (see sidebar) for a few coins, saying that their wonderful smell brings calm and helps sleeping. And it really works! If somehow convinced to reveal her secret, she says she found a small vale on the slopes of a nearby hill where much grow. However, she does not know it is forbidden to pick asphodeli.
2	**Thunder in clear sky.** A thunderclap shakes the still air. The phenomenon is entirely natural, a small collapse booming from a nearby cave, although it causes concern in many bystanders.

3	**The miraculous pharmakon.** A father accompanies to the temple a weak and sickly girl, to offer a sacrifice to the goddess for her healing. As they head to the top, he comforts her, showing her a small terracotta vase he has just bought, saying its contents will help her healing. If the Custodes ask, the man says it is Hyblaean honey (see page 102), sold at a hefty price by a trader in town.
4	**Playing on the shore.** An adolescent girl plays with a cup of molten wax on the still shores of the lake. The girl is capable of performing a *Pegomancy* ritual (see page 167), taught to her by her old grandmother, offering to perform the ritual for somebody she likes, asking in exchange a favor or a small present. Once the ritual is over, she asks any men in the group to turn and allow her to take her clothes off far from prying eyes, and then dives in to recover the wax.
5	**The farmers procession.** A loud crowd of farmers and their relatives is headed to the shrine, bearing offerings of wheat, vegetables, and seasonal food, there to thank the goddess for the fertility of the fields and orchards.
6	**The old beggar**. An old woman, dirty and dressed in rags, attempts to grab the arm of a Custos, begging for some coins. If mistreated or refused the few coins, she casts a hex on them (on the Custos' next three dice rolls, the die with the highest number of sides automatically rolls a 1. If more than one die has the highest number of sides, it is the one with the best result).
7	**The generous wine of Sicilia.** A local landowner comes to thank the goddess, accompanied by two slaves, for gracing him with a grandson, born after a hard delivery. He offers some of his excellent wine to all bystanders, and if the Custodes do not explicitly say they do not want to drink too much, they must pass a **Vigor** roll (DT 9) or be sluggish and sleepy for the next 1d3 hours, temporarily losing 2 Coordinatio, Ingenium, Ratio, and Sensibilitas points.
8	**An unexpected danger.** All of a sudden, the faithful begin scampering for safety. Inside the shrine have appeared two Dipsas (see page 198), and it is up to the Custodes to intervene or flee.
9	**A ruined man.** A patrician who owns a large estate near Ibla Minor, along the Gela river, six hours on foot to the south of Henna, is there to ask how to deal with the drought that is devastating his fields and orchards and growing worse by the day. The oracle gives him clues that eventually lead to the Custodes, and, if they agree to help him, they are led to his magnificent villa, decorated with refined mosaics. The issue seems to be a Salamander (see page 207) that has settled between two fields. If the group eliminates it, the man will be forever grateful.
10	**The powerful amulet.** A man down on his luck claims not to have enough to feed his family, but to be in possession of a powerful amulet, a weathered Greek coin, that protects travelers from misfortune, calming storms and keeping wild animals at bay as long as its owner raises it to the sky in their right hand. The man is willing to part with it for but a few sestertii. However, it is just a mundane old coin.

THE REALMS OF ANCIENT GODDESSESS

In numerous regions of Italia, the cults of ancient female divinities are still alive. These goddessess are worshiped both as benevolent mothers and as mistresses over ancient and terrible powers.

THE WOODS OF VACUNA

The cult of Vacuna comes from the lands of the Osci, Umbri, and Sabini, and was brought to Rome by King Numa Pompilius, of Sabin descent. She was also greatly honored by Emperor Vespasian, born in Reate, and the cult of the goddess Vacuna was found mostly in the woods around that city.

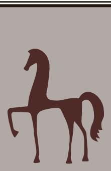
VACUNA THE SILENT

Vacuna is an elusive goddess, hard to identify and describe. The Augurs have unsuccessfully attempted to classify her, deciding instead to define her *incerta specie*, "of unknown type". Her name is associated with emptiness (*vacuum*) and absence (*vacatio*), and the historian Tacitus loved her much for an assonance of sorts between his name and one of the titles of the goddess, "*Tacita* for she is silent, incorruptible, intelligible". Such attribution is mostly due to her unusual mysteries, for she does not require great shrines or loud cults, instead preferring to be worshiped in the silence of the groves and whispering rivers.

Vacuna is often considered a motherly deity, although she can give both life and death. Where she manifests, there is life. Where she does not, there is death. She is also a deity of war, even without taking part in the fighting. She accompanies warriors into battle, and then she welcomes the victors in their glory, leading the valorous dead to Hades. The cult of Vacuna is often ambivalent; there are those who pray to the benevolent goddess, but there also are those who silently curse her as a bringer of death.

THE ISLE THAT IS AND IS NOT

Among the many places where Vacuna is worshiped, there is one that is greatly unusual, an isle at the center of Lacus Cutiliensis, not far from Reate. The temple of Mars in the nearby town of Tiora featured, according to Dyonisios and Varo, an unusual oracle that gave its responses through a woodpecker on the top of a wooden column, not much different from the oracle of Dodona, with its dove on a sacred oak. However, these prodigies do not compare to what I am about to tell you.



FINDING THE INVISIBLE TEMPLE OF VACUNA

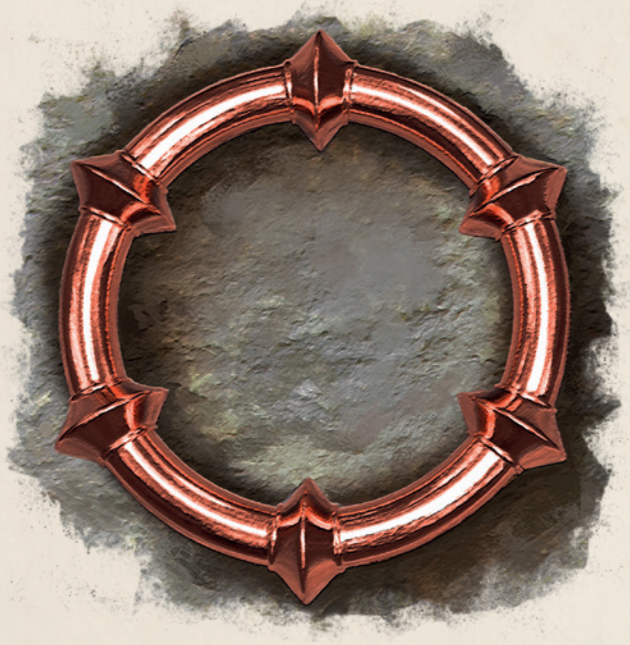
It is said that the divination rites performed in the temple of Vacuna are always exact, no matter how complex, forbidden, forgotten, or mysterious the question. However, it is also said that finding this temple is impossible. Nobody has ever seen it, in spite of all the ancient texts claiming it is at the center of Lake Cutiliensis, on the sometimes-visible isle, leading some to believe it is just a fairy tale. They say staring at the center of the lake or taking a boat is pointless, for there is nothing to see there, only the risk of being being thrown overboard by mysterious currents. Others, instead, believe the isle and temple are visible with the new moon, in the darkest of darkness, to those who know what to look for. The ancient documents preserved by the Pontifices suggest lighting four torches on the banks of the lake, placing them in correspondence to the four main celestial directions. First, light the one on the western shore, then on the eastern, then southern, and finally northern, tracing the sacred *templum*, as the Augurs do when they interrogate the heavens. The lake is small enough that the four torches are easily seen anywhere. When the night reaches its darkest moment, the reflection of each torch leans into the lake, meeting the other three and forming a luminous cross on the surface of the water. Where they meet, on the "mundus", the sacred pit at the center of each templum, one can see something missing, a void. It is the isle that absorbs the light and reveals its presence.

It is strictly forbidden to have lights on the island, for the island would disappear, visitors included. At its center should be a small circular temple, a shadow even darker than a moonless sky. Divination rituals performed there have their difficulty lowered by 1 level, if the group has performed the rite of the torches correctly.

The ancient legends tell that around this lake was sealed the alliance between the Aborigines, the mythical first inhabitants of Italia, and the eastern Pelasgi. The lake did not have the island at that time. The Pelasgi, according to their ancient customs, offered sacrifices to Pluto by throwing war prisoners into the lake, believing it to be one of the entrances to the world of Hades. The goddess Vacuna, outraged by such needless bloodshed, ordered it to stop and, instead of snuffing the "light" of real lives, offer "lights" of other kinds. Pelasgi and Aborigines, then, made peace and obeyed Vacuna by releasing floating lanterns on the lake, which made their way to an invisible island at its center. There, they built a small temple, and since then the island has come and gone. It has been invisible for many centuries now, and those who sail across the lake have never said to have found it. However, in the silence of moonless nights, one can see small lights on the water stopping at the center of the lake, before disappearing come morn.

THE SHRINE TO CUPRA THE RED

On the Hadriatic coast of Picenum, near Cupra Maritima, is the shrine to the goddess Cupra. The origins of this place of worship are so ancient the locals believe it was founded by the mythical Pelasgi.



THE RING OF CUPRA

In the regions where the cult of Cupra has spread, one can find an amulet made of the copper dear to the goddess, a ring with six evenly spaced bumps or "knots". The rings are as wide as a drinking glass, and as such are worn on the arm, but women often wear them in a belt on their hips, leading some to believe they were considered in ancient times to promote fertility. A more careful observer may notice, however, that men, too, wear them, often multiple of them. The owners of these rings frequently make them spin among their fingers, touching one knot after the other with their thumb. It looks almost like an afterthought, however some have observed that as they go through these gestures, they move their lips, as if mouthing words. Is it a spell? Maybe an exorcism against bad luck or hexes?

Scholars believe these "bind" one's life essence to their body and are supposed to help against diseases, hunger, thirst, fatigue, and even wounds, with some even claiming the rings of Cupra slow aging. Every knot has a specific quality, making these rings powerful amulets.

The locals laugh at these theories, saying they are but simple family heirlooms.

The shrine of Cupra says the lore to craft these amulets is lost, although the make of some of the rings on the clothing of the locals seems to be recent, not to mention that almost everybody wears at least one. Do they all date back to the ancient centuries before Rome?

Whatever their secret is, it is possible to ask a priestess for a special blessing connected to a ring. Over the course of an elaborate ritual, the priestess wraps a copper wire around the wrist of the petitioner, forming a bracelet closed by six evenly spaced knots. In game terms, the bracelet prevents the soul of its wearer from being captured (by the magic power Soul Sucking, for example) for a number of times equal to its knots, with one unwrapping each time the ring's effect is triggered. The priestesses of Cupra grant only one such item per person.

WARDER OF BLOOD

Cupra is an ancient goddess, deeply loved in the whole region and around it. Since many have worshiped her for a long time, she goes by many names: Cupra among the Latins, *Kubrar* is the name the Umbri gave her, *Ikiperu* for the Piceni, and *Kupra* for the Sabini. She is a goddess of the earth, mistress of what lives underground, patroness of underground springs and minerals. In particular, she manifests in the strength of the blood that runs beneath our skin and is represented by copper, the red metal hidden in the bowels of the earth, with which are made special amulets, the "Cupran rings" (see sidebar on page 99), and the sheets on which her faithful carve their supplications. The latter seem to be used mostly by women, as Cupra also heals bloodborne diseases and watches over their monthly period and general health.

THE *CONFOEDERATIO PICENA*

The largest shrine dedicated to this goddess is on another mountain in the Piceni territory, overlooking the Mare Adriaticum. The foundation of this sacred place is lost in time, some saying it was founded by the Pelasgi, the ancient progenitors of the Etruscans, who always considered it a sacred place. However, it became a key location for the Piceni, who used it as a religious center and a trade hub, earning it the Greek monicker of "*emporion*", a trading place. Although divided into many smaller tribes, the cunning Piceni realized soon that their divisions would have made them vulnerable to the predations of their more powerful neighbors, the Gauls chief among them, so they banded into the Federation of the Piceni, the Confoederatio Picena. Each tribe had its leader and was free to decide its own destiny, but in case of war or threats gathered under one leader. The tribes always met, both for ordinary and extraordinary reasons, at the shrine of Cupra.

Note that in doing so the Piceni could resist both the advance of the Gauls from the north and Etruscan pressure from the west. Once they met Rome, the Confederatio wisely sought an alliance with the new power, and so it was peacefully absorbed into the new political order.

THE SACRED OAKS OF MARÌCA

This goddess was worshiped by the ancient people of Latium, particularly among the Aurunci. The ancient traditions portray her as the wife of the god Faunus and mother of King Latinus, ancient progenitor of the twins Romulus and Remus, making her an ancestor of Rome, even if her territory was much to the south of the Urbs.

Marìca is a water goddess, as her name includes the ancient word *mara*, which means "swamps". She protects woodland creatures, opposes hunting, and is often portrayed dressed in veils and crowned with flowers, often on the bank of a river.

THE SACRED SWAMP

The main shrine of Marìca is still on the north shore of the Liris, the river that separates Latium from Campania, a few hundred feet from its mouth. The entrance of the temple looks to the river, from which it is separated only by the few steps that make a small dock. This is the only access, requiring a boat to visit the temple. The surroundings are dotted with mires and swamps, so it is better to hire a local guide.

The temple is decorated with tuff columns, a material typical of Latium, and has maintained through the centuries its rustic and ancient looks, for the priests of Marìca refuse to lavishly decorate it as is customary for most other temples. It was only after it suffered grave damage that they accepted repairs in travertine, and only because it is a local marble. The temple has an outer altar, right on the small dock, not used for traditional sacrifices, but to burn odorous herbs or light scented candles made of the purest beeswax.

THE *LUCUS MARICAE*

The original place of worship for Marìca, however, was the oak grove (lucus) on the south bank of the Liris, opposite to the temple. In this grove, the goddess was worshiped by tying flower crowns to colorful ribbons dangling from the branches of the oaks, or by hanging a small dish with seasonal fruits or flowers. Terracotta statuettes were also thrown into the river.

Those rites are still followed in the grove, where only the members of the cult are allowed to enter. Anything that is inside cannot leave, even the timber that spontaneously falls off of trees. Its animals cannot be killed or harmed, and its herbs cannot be gathered. The one exception is the festival dedicated to the goddess, when the priests cut twigs with silver sickles, anoint them with scented oils, and hand them to the faithful, who then bear them through the grove, following the statues of the goddess in procession. When the celebration is over, the faithful bring the blessed branches home and burn them on their own domestic altars to invoke divine protection for the incoming year.

THE SEAL OF MARÌCA

Because the grove of Marìca cannot be touched, it is also used to store things that should be forever kept secret. The grove is dotted with wooden crates, actual safes, and baskets simply leaning against the trunk of a large tree, each bearing the seal of Marìca, an oak leaf, on hot wax. Anybody can leave something in the sacred grove, and the priests neither ask nor check what is in the crates. They will remain there, under the protection of Marìca, and nobody will be able to take them without being cursed by the goddess.

Such special protection, however, is not without consequences. One must be aware that whatever they bring to Marìca will never leave without consequences, not even with its rightful owner.

TAKING SOMETHING FROM THE GROVE OF MARÌCA

Whoever steals something from the grove faces a strong, long lasting Curse. In addition to suffering the *Cursed* condition, the difficulty of their De Natura rolls increases by 1 level, and, when near a body of water, they are more likely to fall in and drown, as if attracted by some unseen force. To break the Curse, the character needs to place the stolen item back where they took it from and offer a sacrifice in reparation.

Exceptionally, the goddess may be asked permission to temporarily take an item for a time to perform a task with it, and not longer than a month and a day in any case. This requires a sacrifice of rare and precious herbs, while presenting the exact reason why one is asking for such a favor, which must be honest and selfless. The goddess then weighs the request and answers with signs in the smoke that only her priests know how to interpret. Often it is denial, although she is known for occasionally asking a service in return for her blessing, which often takes the form of a mission to restore the natural balance somewhere it has been perturbed. It is up to the Demiurge to allow it or not and, if so, to determine the nature of this task.

In addition, anybody who wanders the grove can see anything left there, so most hide their items in cavities, between branches, or generally out of sight. It is necessary, then, to take precise note of where one left their items, to trace them back and ensure nobody has taken them.

Marìca punishes all transgressors equally, no matter whether they have taken a leaf or a golden crown.

REITIA, MISTRESS OF KEYS

This goddess has been worshiped since time immemorial by the people of Venetia and Histria. She is a mistress of nature and animals, but most of all she is "clavigera", bearing and watching over keys. The best known of the clavigerae is Hekate, threshold mistress and protector of the passage between our world and the one below. There are others, however: Janus, who sees both forward and backward and protects the flowing of the past into the present, Sol, who welcomes the day every morning, and Luna, patroness of the night.

Reitia is different from them, as she watches over different keys, presiding over the first door, birth, and then opening or closing the gates of destiny, shaping existence, allowing us to take one path instead of others, then another and another, and so on. Throughout our lives, she constantly multiplies the opportunities available to us.

Reitia is portrayed with a peculiar costume, similar to the ancient Cretan goddesses, a tight-fitting bodice woven with animal motifs and a rigid skirt that widens at her feet, holding a wide, lavishly decorated apron, her hair worked to look as if she were wearing a cap.

THE LOST ART OF THE DOORS

Reitia was served by a priesthood of women who spent their lives studying a special form of magic through written words, tracing magical formulas to "open" and "close" the doors of existence and manipulate the future. These priestesses still exist, although they have forgotten their ancient art and now can only perform traditional sacrifices like every other temple of the Empire, lighting ritual fires on the altars and sacrificing victims. They are still scholarly and wise, accepting students who wish to learn how to serve the goddess, but speak, write, and read only Latin. None is still capable of harnessing the ancient formulas, let alone inventing new ones, so the future is sealed, and nobody can alter it anymore. Or, at least, so the priestesses of Reitia claim.

THE SACRED WRITING

According to the ancient Veneti, Reitia invented writing. They had their own alphabet long before the other Italic peoples, leading to the spreading of the legend that they had received this gift from their goddess.

For the last four centuries, however, both the alphabet and the language of the Veneti have fallen out of use, their being claimed to be so similar to Latin as to have been absorbed into common parlance. It is also said that in the mountains of Venetia some still remember some words of the ancient language, but we do not have actual evidence of it yet.

As the language disappeared, its alphabet, by then solidly replaced by our own, soon followed. Now, this would not be an issue, if to the ancient Venetic alphabet were not tied the rites to open and close the doors of the future, and also the famous amulets called "Keys of Reitia" (see page 180). Although the rites are now lost to us, the amulets are still somewhat widespread, although so far, we have no idea what their purpose is. The Augurs believe understanding their power to be important and are attempting to reconstruct both alphabet and language.

Some scholars believe the Venetic alphabet resembled ancient Etruscan, although unfortunately the latter has now entirely disappeared in both its written and spoken forms. It is then impossible to base the reconstruction of the Venetic alphabet on that one. This is actually positive, for there are only a handful of people who speak either language, and any inscriptions in either alphabet are attributed to both, even if the two systems are very different from one another. Still, we continue to look for breakthroughs in the study of the Keys of Reitia, but, although the goddess is still worshiped, her temples have not contributed anything solid to the research effort.

THE BEES OF HYBLAEA

On the eastern coast of Sicilia, between Catana and Syracusae, is a city that kept its Greek name even under the rule of Rome, Megara Hyblaea, "great Hyblaea", named after the ancient local goddess, Hyblaea. The city was destroyed in the wars with Carthago and never rebuilt, but the memory of the goddess remained alive all over the region and on the surrounding Hyblaeii Mountains.

Hyblaea was a goddess of fertility, whom the first Greek colonist identified with Aphrodite, our Venus, as testified to by the mentions of our own Venus Hyblaea, mistress of wealth and the pleasant lands of Sicilia.

Ancient Hyblaea, however, had other characteristics the Greeks did not consider; she was *"Pòthnia Thèron"*, Mistress of the Wild Animals, claiming dominion over the whole animal kingdom, bees in particular, for their key role in pollination. In this sense, she truly is a goddess of fertility.

The goddess has always been portrayed bearing wheat in her right hand and a torch in her left.

THE PROCESSION OF THE BEES

Hyblaea is celebrated in the three nights of the Kalende of April. All over the region, people sing and dance and offer to the goddess special honey breads, eaten with friends and family and prepared with Hyblaean honey, renowned all over the Empire since ancient times.

This honey is unusual. During the sacred days, the priests walk the blooming fields followed by an immense, vibrating procession of bees, which are led by playing ancient humming bronze instruments that call bees from all over the region. During that procession, the bees feed on the magnificent flowers they find all along the way, making a special honey that is bottled in the coming months by the priests in apple-sized jars and used to heal whoever needs it. In exchange for a modest donation, the priests also hand the faithful small honey jars sealed with the bee of Hyblaea. Hyblaean honey resembles the one made on the Achaian mount Hymettus, as it can be used either pure or diluted to heal. It is known for its strong aroma of thyme, the plant sacred to Hyblaea that grows abundantly in the plain she rules over.

MELIS HYBLAEUS
HYBLAEAN HONEY

Although an entirely natural remedy, it is considered by the local population to be a cure for all ailments, often the only one the lower classes have access to.

It has strong anti-inflammatory and cleansing properties and is a thick, fair-colored preparation, strongly scented of thyme, which grants a +1 bonus to Vigor rolls against malnourishment and diseases. As such, it is often used for long marches with little food available, the recommended dose being one tablespoon a day. Poorer folks often eat less, to make it last longer, benefiting from reduced effects. Hyblaean honey is also applied on wounds to avoid gangrene and expedite scarring (the Custos can check the *Treated* box without rolling for First Aid).

A jar costs roughly a sestertius at the temple of Hyblaea, between 5 and 10 in the local towns, and between 50 and 100 in Sicilia. Anywhere else in Empire, it is sold for 200 sestertii, or even more.

THE LANDS OF THE WOLVES

In the heart of Italia are numerous people claiming to incarnate the spirit of the wolf, tracing their origins to this warlike animal. As much as the wolf is a strong, aggressive, and combative animal, it does, however, live in packs, with a hierarchy similar to human communities. Its pups are numerous, leading the wolf to be associated with fertility. It takes care of them and protects the weak, covering great distances for the safety of its community. It is no coincidence that Rome exists only because a she-wolf wanted to raise and protect our founders, the twins Romulus and Remus.

Since the wolf has both positive and negative attributes, its descendants somehow reflect both, some peaceful and devoted to benign gods, others aggressive followers of dark deities.

HIRPINIA

This land is named after the Hirpini, in ancient times part of the great Samnite family. The Hirpini separated from the Samnites through the ritual of the *ver sacrum*, the "sacred spring", migrating as they followed the wolf as their guiding animal. The name Hirpini derives from the *hirpus*, the wolf in their ancient language.

The great Greek historian Strabo considered the Hirpini the greatest warriors of Italia, as demonstrated by how much it took Rome to defeat them over the course of the Samnite Wars, as the Hirpini were the last to lay down arms, not because they had lost the will to fight, but because there were no warriors left to wield weapons against us. Therefore, technically they have never surrendered.

THE WOLF DEN

At the dawn of time, some Samniti children of the sacred spring chose the wolf as their guiding spirit and changed their name to Hirpini, or "wolf children". In their pilgrimage, they headed to the mountains, a fitting destination for such animal, rather than to the plains like many others.

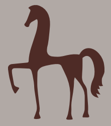
Their most ancient settlement, then, should be modern-day Aeclanum, roughly 18 miles to the southeast of Beneventum. It is a mountainous area, with the settlement overlooking the only pass through its peaks as the Via Appia crosses its inhabited core. Aeclanum is always garrisoned with troops to ensure the pass remains in working order, as here pass all the convoys headed to Campania, contributing to a small but vibrant local market. All around are mountains covered in impenetrable forests, where civilization is but a pale memory. Those who leave the town headed into the mountains soon lose sight of the sun under the thick canopy, and at night the howling of the wolves echoes in the woods, while fog coils around the trees.

THE RITE OF *VER SACRUM*

This ancient rite was celebrated in ancient times by all the Mediterranean peoples in moments of great need, such as famine or an epidemic. In exchange for the help of the gods, they promised to sacrifice all the first produce, both the first fruits of the earth and the newborns of their cattle, in the following spring, in a ritual called called *ver sacrum*, "sacred spring". In particularly dire moments, they used to offer even their children, although they were not killed, but considered *sacrati*, consecrated to perform a deed to celebrate the gods once they reached adulthood. Twenty years after their consecration, both males and females left their community to found a new people somewhere else. In this bold journey, they were guided by a sacred animal, the conduit between the new community and the gods from that moment onward. The leader of a ver sacrum migration was always chosen from among those who showed the traits of a seer, to remain in contact with the guiding animal and the gods, as lacking the required sensitivity could spell the doom of the entire community and the failure of the sacred deed. The consequences, in such a dire case, would have been disastrous for their community of origin, too. Led by the spirit guide, the sacrati left in pilgrimage, walking until their spirit guide stopped, to found their new community.

The animals traditionally chosen as guides were the boar, strong and prolific, the stag, majestic and resilient, the bull, mighty and fecund, the ox, powerful and patient, and of course the wolf, a ferocious protector of its clan.

These lands belong to the wolves in the broadest sense. Not only do these wild animals roam undisturbed, but legend claims that the local inhabitants are capable of turning into wolves themselves (see sidebar on page 103).



THE *LUPUS HIRPINUS*

In Hirpinia there is talk of a mythical creature, the *Lupus Hirpinus*. Local legends claim the Hirpini can take the shape of wolves at will, and that the "wolves" are, in fact, humans. However, unlike the Versipellis, this is not a curse! Once they take their wolf form, the Hirpini can even fight as the mighty creatures, returning to human form without issue. This seems to be a "gift" born of the purity of the blood of certain families, and possibly the reason why some have avoided marriage with outsiders throughout the centuries. Although there are reports from trustworthy sources claiming to have seen a wolf where a man was but a few moments before, we have no first-hand accounts of the actual transformation in the moment it is happening, and so this prodigious capacity of the Hirpini has never been entirely confirmed. Some say it is only a legend, and that the Hirpini can only communicate with wolves, calling on them as helpers or familiars, perhaps the reason behind the legend being that where there is one of the Hirpini, usually a wolf is not far away, and vice versa.

WORSHIPERS OF THE INFERNAL MOTHER

The area settled by the ancient Hirpini is close to the heart of the cult of Mephitis, the Infernal Mother (see page 75). Lake Ampsanctus, in fact, is but 10 miles to the southeast of Aeclanum, leading to a spiritual kinship between the two. Many Hirpini became worshipers of the fearsome goddess and extended her influence over their neighbors, giving this deity of death and chaos the arms of a people of relentless warriors. Quite the ruinous combination, indeed!

We shall never tire, then, of repeating that wandering around Aeclanum without preparation is foolish and dangerous.

LUCANIA

This region to the south of the previous one is a fertile and pleasant land, bordering to the west with the Tyrrhenic coast, to the southeast with the gulf of Tarentum, and to the north with the Appennine Mountains, named *Enotria*, land of wine, by the Greeks.

Here, too, lived a people born under the sign of the wolf, the Lucani, their name believed to be descending from the Greek word for "wolf", *lykos*, although there is another theory that links them to the sacred grove, *lucus*. The two theories do not seem to be necessarily in contrast, the wolf being a woodland creature.

Lucania does not have particular mountains, being mostly fertile plains abundant in wheat and grapes. Because of this, it was soon settled by the Greeks, against whom the Lucani fought for a long time before they could claim the region as their own.

CHILDREN OF APOLLO LYKEOS

It is said that the Lucani, too, were born from the rite of the sacred spring, splitting from a population of Oscan language. Contrary to common belief, however, this new people did not take the name of an animal spirit, but of the man who guided them in their fist migration, someone called Luceius or Lucius, said to have taken that name in honor of the god Apollo *Lykeos*, the "hunter of wolves". This would set them apart from the Hirpini, who consider themselves children of the wolf and would never dare opposing this animal.

The Lucani, claiming to descend from a wolf hunter, marked their opposition to the ferocious nature of this animal, becoming defenders of the defenseless and shepherds and, therefore, hunters of wolves. Not only did they hunt "normal" wolves, but soon also specialized in fighting those that were not normal, such as those of Iguvium (see page 198) or the magical Versipellis. Proud of their calling, the Lucani placed the wolf on their coins as a charm against evil, and still to this day these most rare pieces bearing the image of the wolf are considered precious talismans.

METAPONTUM, A LOST SEAT OF POWER

Present-day Lucania boasts numerous wealthy cities, although the only one I should mention here, as unusual as it may seem, is ancient, lost Metapontum. It stood not far from the coast, supposedly founded by the Greek hero Nestor as he returned from the Trojan War. It soon became wealthy and powerful, but always hostile to Rome, first standing with Pyrrhus when he invaded Italia, then with Hannibal, and finally sheltering the rebellious gladiators of Spartacus. It was destroyed, and today ruins are all that is left of this once-powerful city.

I must mention, however, that in Metapontum lived and then died the Greek mathematician Pythagoras. Here, he founded one of his philosophical and esoteric schools, which gathered numerous followers. They kept preaching his magical and mathematical theories and, after Metapontum was destroyed, moved to the city of Kroton (see page 141).

Noteworthy is the shrine to Apollo Lykeos, once a florid religious center attended by all the "wolf hunters". The local authorities report of nightly gatherings at the shrine, but the local sentries could not find any visitors.

THE HUNTERS OF LUCANIA

The lands of the Lucani have always been protected by a special tribe of hunters, who claim to descend from Lucius, he who first guided the new community in its migration from the lands of the Osci to Lucania. Lucius, for his part, had named himself after Apollo Lykeos, "Apollo who kills wolves", and, inspired by this manifestation of the god, his descendants became great archers, Apollo's own deadly weapon.

The hunters of Lucania have operated for centuries in small bands of 15 to 20 men. Initially, they were tasked with patrolling and defending their lands from wolves, to prevent them from raiding helpless farmers or shepherds. During their watch, they have fought long and hard against all manner of wolves, learning how to hunt them better than anybody else. So, they developed a special weapon, the *fustibalus*, a more powerful version of the sling, which throws *glandes argenteae*, silver projectiles (see page 177). They also took part as independent warriors in the many wars fought in Lucania, always choosing the most beneficial side for them, and when Rome entered the scene, they did not let our army absorb them. On the contrary, they fought us for years, with tactics that inflicted grievous losses on us, leaving their forests only for short and brutal raids against weaker targets, vanishing before we could mount a counterattack. Although the damage they dealt each time was modest, the sheer number of these attacks eventually caused great attrition, as well as gravely compromising the morale of the troops. We came to a truce with them, as the army respected and could use their adaptability, speed of execution, and small-scale tactics. Rome, then, offered the Hunters a place in our military, with regular pay, and lifted any charge, if they taught us their "hit and run" warfare. Most of them accepted, and many today are also instructors of the new Cohors Arcana, given their operational similarities.

There are others, however, who have chosen independence and now roam the forests of Lucania.

IGUVIUM

Finally, I must mention the peculiar case of the town of Iguvium, in Regio VI (Umbria).

It was at first a city-state named Ikuvium, proud in spite of its diminutive size. Its people were Umbri, and its territory divided into ten districts, called *decuviae*, each split into two areas under the influence of a noble family. In town, then, were twenty small communities that, instead of fighting with one another, contributed to the well-being of the city. In case of discord, all the families bowed to the supreme authority of a local priest, the Flamen. The strong spirituality of the town can be somehow traced to the presence of the nearby ancient mountain shrine of Jupiter Appenninus (see page 90).

When Rome began its expansion in Italia, coming to blows with the Samnites, the Etruscans, and the Cisalpine Gauls, Iguvium remained neutral, the town keeping its proud independence in spite of all its powerful and dangerous neighbors. Eventually, it was absorbed into the Roman sphere, but as a respected ally.

Some whisper that the tenacious independence of Iguvium is not just born of political circumstances, claiming that around the town has always lived a special breed of wolf, the *Lupus Iguvinum*, that, once domesticated, could prove greatly useful to mankind (see page 198).

THE TABULAE IGUVINAE

Another reason why this small town should be brought to your attention is an ancient finding of as-of-yet obscure interpretation. It is seven bronze tablets carved with partially unknown ritual formulas in the ancient and now-forgotten Umbran language, with a minor part written in Etruscan and Latin. Thanks to the latter, seemingly a summary of the Umbran segment, we have learned that the Tabulae Iguvinae contain forgotten curses. Of course, there must be much more in the text that we could not translate, so the Pontifices have been gathering all the inscriptions in this language scattered around Iguvium, to form a base from which to translate the Tabulae. Allow me to bring to your attention a most disconcerting detail, one more in the dark fame of the Tabulae Iguvinae; supposedly, one is missing. Where is it? What was written on it?

ITALIC MAGIC

THE ENCHANTED WATERS

Italia is blessed with countless springs that make the land fertile and pleasant, allowing agriculture and the birth of many wealthy cities. It comes as no surprise that almost anywhere in Italia is a magical spring, with healing properties or the lair of a magical creature.

The reality is that the truly magical springs are but a few. Some we only believe to exist because of the concentration of inexplicable supernatural effects, while others are known only in folklore. Whatever the case, we do not possess accurate information on most of them.

THE *LYMPHAE*

According to the erudite Servius, *nulla enim fons non sacer,* "there is no spring that is not sacred", so the Pontifices have ordered treating any and all Italic springs as potentially magical, for each is probably inhabited by a supernatural creature.

In the Saturnia Tellus, lives a special race of water nymphs, not to be confused with the Greek Naiads. These nymphs manifest their powers, which are all related to healing and farsight, through water. They are also the messengers of the Underworld, friends and followers of the goddess Proserpina, because water comes from the depths of the earth. The Lymphae also live in the courses of rivers, sometimes going as far as their mouths.

It is said that it was thanks to the help of the Lymphae that Rome could weave the complex defensive spells on the Rubicon, marking for a long time the border with the lands of the Gauls.

The Lymphae are usually well-disposed towards mortals, but their wrath is terrible to behold and should not be provoked, being capable of sending someone into a state of apathy or driving them to delirious and murderous rage.

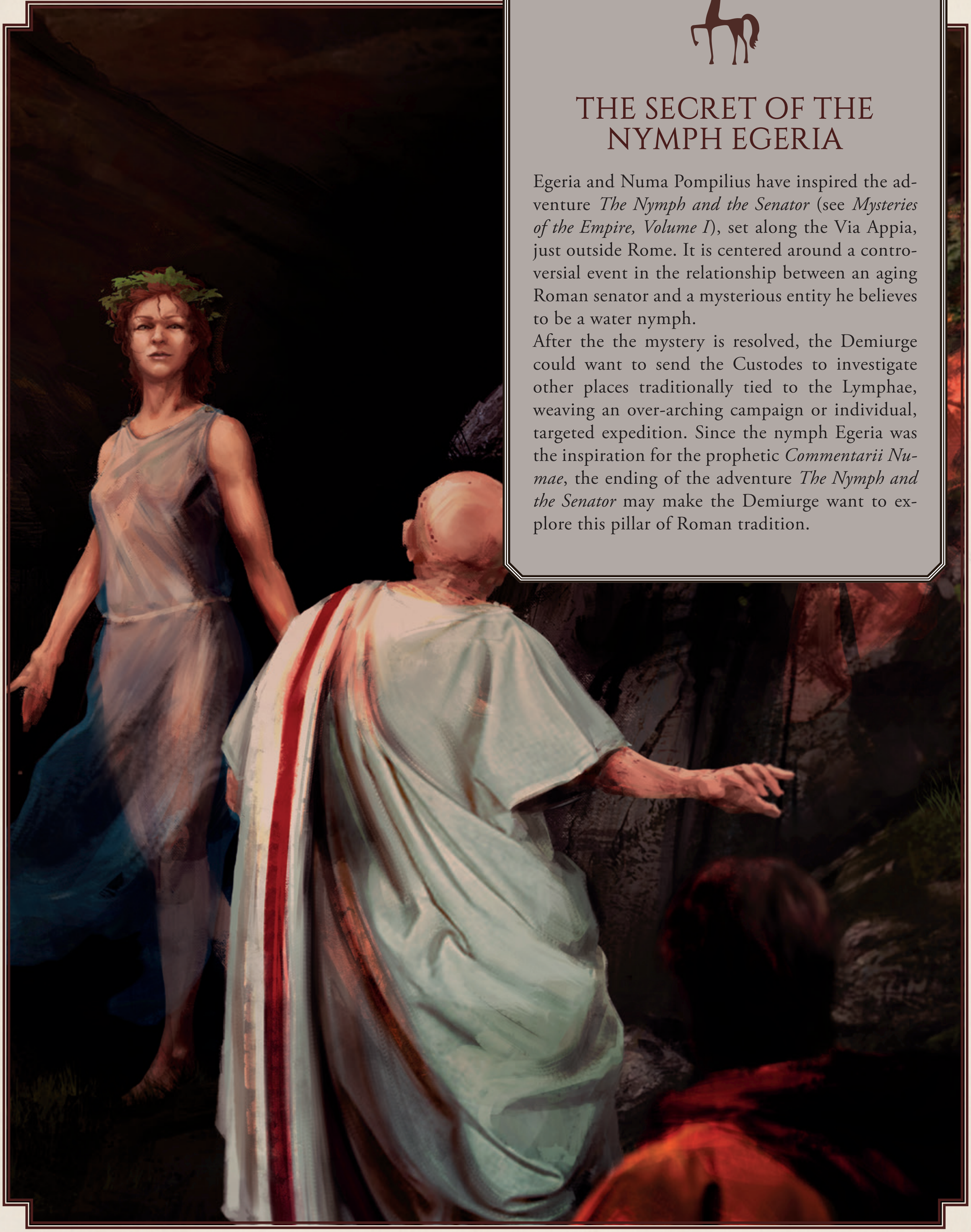
Most of the Lymphae are unknown, and nobody knows where they live, but of a few, we know the names and the springs at which they are worshiped. They are:

- **Arethusa.** She lives in Syracusae, in a spring near the island of Ortygia. A follower of Diana until a young hunter, Alfeios, fell in love with her and began following her everywhere she went, the goddess Diana then allowed Arethusa to become completely invisible as long as she was in water, so now she appears and disappears at will inside her spring. On the banks of the Arethusa spring grow papyrus plants rumored to be special, under the control of the local Cohors Arcana since some self-proclaiming mages began taking them without permission, claiming the magics written on those supports to be more powerful.
- **Egeria.** She is one of the four Camenae goddesses, the others being Carmenta, Antevorta, and Postvorta, who have lived in ancient Latium since time immemorial. Egeria is the best known, by tradition, as the wife and adviser of the king Numa Pompilius, the one who inspired the venerable king to write the *Commentarii Numae*, a personal journal containing notes and precise instructions on a great variety of magical rituals. Her prophetic gift aside, Egeria is particularly connected to water, and is the mistress of a magical spring of unfortunately lost location.
- **Juturna.** According to the ancient legends, she was loved by Jupiter himself, who granted her immortality and rule over all the waters of Latium. She was also said to be the sister of Turnus, king of the Rutuli, to whom Lavinia, daughter of the Latin king, was promised. However, as Lavinia had been given in marriage to Aeneas, as he escaped the Trojan War, war broke out between the Rutuli and Latini, the latter allied to the Trojans. During the fighting, Turnus died, in spite of Juturna's best efforts to save him, and the Trojans eventually won. The best known of the springs of Juturna is in the Forum of Rome and is called *Lacus Juturnae*. There was once a *Fons Juturnae* in Lavinium, possibly the original, with stronger powers, but today it is lost.
- **Lara.** The mother of the Lares, the gods who watch over houses, Lara was the unwilling protagonist of a marital fight between the gods, as she knew of the secret love of Jupiter and Juturna but made the mistake of telling Juno. Jupiter's wrath was such that he took from her the gift of speech and tasked Mercury with leading her to the Underworld. Mercury, however, fell in love with her, and together they originated the Lares. Lara's original spring is lost, but it is suspected to be next to one of the entrances to Hades.
- **The Anguane** (sing. Anguana). These are mysterious creatures who dwell only in the rivers of the Venetian mountains. Some claim there are some in the lagoons, too, especially in Aquae Gradatae, the port of Aquileia, and Praedium Mariani, at the mouth of the Tilaventum. The Anguane are known for occasionally being aggressive toward those who do not pay nature and their waters the proper respect, their screams so loud people have fainted or were driven insane. Usually, however, they are benign, and the locals claim to have learned from the Anguane numerous typical activities, such as working wool and making cheese. Legends say they love colors, can be spotted swimming dressed in colorful clothes, and sometimes are visible in water.

THE SECRET OF THE NYMPH EGERIA

Egeria and Numa Pompilius have inspired the adventure *The Nymph and the Senator* (see *Mysteries of the Empire, Volume I*), set along the Via Appia, just outside Rome. It is centered around a controversial event in the relationship between an aging Roman senator and a mysterious entity he believes to be a water nymph.

After the the mystery is resolved, the Demiurge could want to send the Custodes to investigate other places traditionally tied to the Lymphae, weaving an over-arching campaign or individual, targeted expedition. Since the nymph Egeria was the inspiration for the prophetic *Commentarii Numae*, the ending of the adventure *The Nymph and the Senator* may make the Demiurge want to explore this pillar of Roman tradition.



MAGICAL SPRINGS TABLE

The majority of the Italic magical springs have not been identified yet, so it is always possible that what looks like a normal one is actually magical. If it is, whoever drinks its water rolls 1d20 on the following table. Then, the Demiurge secretly determines any other required details, such as the duration of the effect, although the characters, of course, find out only at the right moment. If the effect has a limited duration, it stops all of a sudden. To benefit from its waters, the group must drink them at the spring. Whoever has drunk from a spring cannot benefit from its waters again for four weeks thereafter.

D20 Roll	Effect
1	The drinker is immune to poisons for 2d6 days.
2	The drinker is instantaneously healed of any wounds or illnesses.
3	The drinker sees in the dark like a cat for 2d6 days.
4	The Vigor and the De Corpore scores of the drinker increase by 2 points each for 2d6 days.
5	The spring has strong diuretic properties for a week.
6	The Sensibilitas and the De Magia scores of the drinker increase by 2 points each for 2d6 days.
7	The water causes lost hair to grow back.
8	The skin of the drinker becomes purple for 2d6 days.
9	The drinker becomes invisible for 2d6 hours.
10	Apparently, nothing happens, but within a few days the character loses all body hair. It grows back only after 2d6 months.
11	The drinker emanates a scent that attracts only creatures with a fine sense of smell, such as dogs, from a long distance.
12	The water has a strong aphrodisiac effect.
13	The drinker is favored by luck! Their next three dice rolls can be each re-rolled once, keeping the new result.
14	For 2d6 hours, the drinker can understand any written or spoken language, but cannot speak or write it.
15	The drinker is immune to fire, lightning, and heat for 2d6 days.
16	The drinker can breathe underwater for 2d6 hours.

17	The drinker experiences an insatiable hunger that forces them to eat five times their usual amount for 2d6 days. During this period, they gain 10 pounds each day.
18	For 2d6 days, the drinker can see a bluish aura around magical items and supernatural creatures.
19	The drinker experiences random hallucinations that could be prophetic, at the discretion of the Demiurge, for the next 2d6 days.
20	For 2d6 days, the drinker gains a sense of smell similar to that of a dog and can follow a track, rolling De Natura or Sensibilitas (frequency and difficulty are left to the Demiurge and the circumstances).

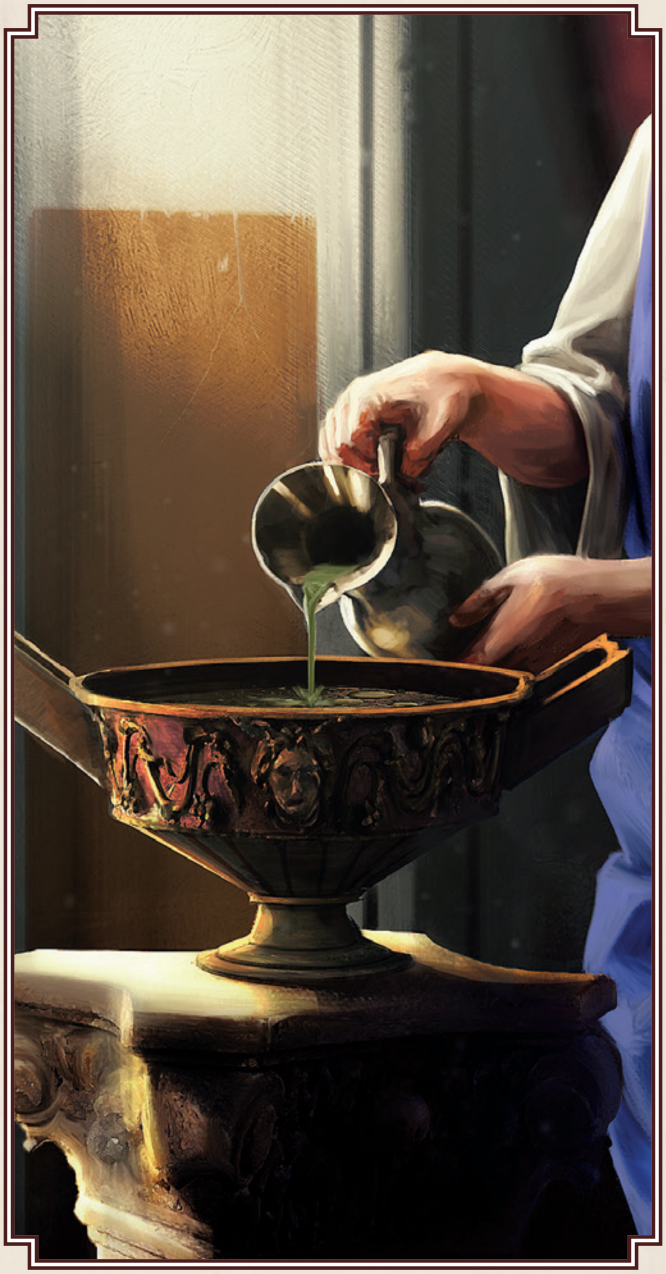
HYDROMANCY

Given the abundance of springs and ponds, in numerous Italic regions has spread a water-based, though unrelated to the aforementioned magical springs, divination system called hydromancy (from the Greek *ydor*, water, and *manteia*, divination). Water is the vessel through which a seer reads the omens, so hydromancy can be practiced anywhere, as long as the water is clear and the seer has an adequate vessel.

Truth be told, hydromancy is a rather generic term that covers numerous divination types, all of which are water-related. The most diffused are:

- **Ceromancy**. By throwing molten wax (*cera* in Latin) or lead in the water, the seer draws the response from the shapes it takes as it rapidly cools.
- **Lekanomancy**. A discipline already practiced by the ancient Assyrians, it consists of filling a consecrated vessel (in Greek *lekane*) with water, adding consecrated oil, and observing how it spreads in the water. A skilled seer can interpret a response from how the oil droplets agglomerate, spread, form striations, or sink.
- **Pegomancy**. By tossing items into a spring or fountain (*peghè* in Greek) and observing the movement they cause in the water, the seer interprets omens. This was also the favorite method of reading the future of Emperor Tiberius, famous for attempting, before he took the throne, such a ritual in the thermal spring of Aponus, a small town not far from Padua, in Regio X. He cast into the spring two golden dice, and, observing as they rolled on the spring floor and their score, he convinced himself he was destined to the Imperial throne. The historian Suetonius claims those dice are still where he left them, explaining the occasional golden shine from the fountain. It is also said that this is the true meaning of the famous sentence “the die is cast”, when Caesar tossed one into the Rubicon to know whether he should cross it in arms or not.

For the new discipline of Hydromancy and its rituals, see page 166.



THE RUBICON, A MAGICAL BULWARK

This river made history when Julius Caesar dared to cross it in arms, breaking a State law, well aware that such a gesture would begin the journey of Rome to the conquest of the world. Here, the Divine Caesar planted the seed of an Empire without end.

A DECEPTIVELY MODEST RIVER

Today, this ancient Italic border does not look like the mythical place it is, neither as magnificent as the Padus nor as noble as the Tiberis. The Rubicon is a small river, subject to capricious weather that makes it swell in winter and almost dry during the summer. It originates in the Appennine Mountains and flows 54 miles into the Mare Adriaticum, to the north of Ariminum.

The Rubicon became relevant as the border between the region under Roman influence and the one to the north where still roamed the Gauls. Back in the time of Julius Caesar, that border was still in use, although by the VI Century AUC the local area had already been consolidated by our troops. Mediolanum, for example, one of the most beautiful cities of the Empire in ancient Cisalpine Gaul, had already fallen into our hands in 531 AUC. It was only in 711 AUC, a few years after Caesar's Gaul campaigns, that the Italic border became the Alps, where it still is to this day.

The Rubicon, however, formed the border only for the eastern side of the Italic Peninsula. In between were the Appennine Mountains, not far from the barrier, and the ancient Etruscan lands to the west.

Then, one may wonder why such an unassuming river played such an important role for such a long time. Unfortunately, the answer is known only to those whose knowledge of fighting dark and occult powers is lost on the masses.

CAESAR AND THE RUBICON

At the crack of dawn on the 10th of January, 704 AUC, five thousand infantry and three hundred cavalry of the Legio XII Gemina crossed the waters of the Rubicon under the command of Julius Caesar. The river, back then, marked the border between Italia proper and Cisalpine Gaul, where the commander was returning home from, awaited by his people with great trepidation, for he had made the frontier safer and then made many donations to the plebs from the spoils of war.

And yet, not everyone in Rome rejoiced for his success. Many actually feared his return, for they believed Caesar, spurred by the glory of his victories, was about to take special powers for himself. After so many centuries, it is difficult to understand the real reasons behind such fear and determined opposition. There are some who say it was a simple matter of politics, the ancient patrician families not taking too kindly to a skilled politician so loved by the people. Others claim that Caesar had the favor of the gods and he had already seen the future, acting to lay the foundations of the Empire without end. According to this theory, then, his opposition counted many occult enemies of Rome who worked to prevent the realization of the prophecies.

Whatever the truth, the enemies of Caesar were successful in appealing to the State law that said that nobody could cross the river in arms, a norm approved in the distant past to prevent Roman commanders with ill intent from closing too much on the Urbs. An ultimatum was voted, ordering Caesar to stop on the border, disband his forces, and resume travel to Rome as a private citizen. Caesar, however, knew that his enemies waited in arms for him, and that proceeding without the protection of his troops would have meant his death.

So, Caesar personally consulted Augurs and omens and asked the opinion of his troops, not wishing to mire his faithful soldiers in a personal war. As he asked, “Are you with me?”, he was greeted with a roar that filled the sky like the thunder of Jupiter, their lives entrusted to their commander one more time.

It was in that moment that Caesar said the fateful sentence, *“Alea jacta est”*, The die is cast. He crossed the Rubicon and, effectively, declared war on the Senate, which called on the troops of Pompeus to fight him, unleashing civil war. After a long and dire conflict, Pompeus was defeated at Pharsalus, in Achaia, order was restored, and Caesar could rule Rome for many long years.

THE MAGICAL BORDER

The Rubicon was enchanted, with great efforts, by our priests. During its first century of life, the Urbs was fragile, and was forced to fight against the many surrounding dangers. Then came the rumor that the Celts had settled the Padan Plain, although they were yet too far away to worry Rome. The Etruscans, on the other hand, already shared a border with the newly arrived people, and soon realized that Celtic strength was not just of arms, but also of their unknown gods, forcing the Etruscans to harness their own supernatural lore and establish a magical, invisible line along the Appennines. Of the three Roman kings of Etruscan descent, Servius Tullius built the first walls around the city and wove an invisible lattice of magical protection parallel to them called *pomerium* (for more information on the *pomerium*, see the *Encyclopaedia Arcana*). Unfortunately, it was not enough. In 363 AUC, the Gauls came south and sacked the Urbs, forcing the Vestales to leave the city to save the sacred fire.

It was then clear that the *pomerium* could not withstand the onslaught. Enemies could not be allowed to draw so close to the Urbs - they had to be stopped further away.

The Vestales, from the Etruscan city of Caere, consulted with the Haruspices and found they had to establish this magical line on the Rubicon River. Haruspices and Vestales understood that for such a colossal task, human hands would have not sufficed. So, they turned to divine help.

A group of nameless heroes, Custodes Arcani who lived for months behind enemy lines, ran along the river from spring to mouth, weaving special protection spells. These Custodes of Rome were helped by ancient water deities, the *Lymphae*, divine creatures dwelling in Italia since the dawn of time (see page 232), who helped in erecting the magical barrier in recognition for their pietas and will to keep the Pax Deorum.

AEAEA, THE ISLAND OF CIRCE

The divine Circe is perhaps the most famous witch in history. Poets and storytellers have written about her, from Greek Homer to our very own Vergilius, on the brink between legend and myth. After all, how is it possible to define with certainty a goddess, daughter of gods, mistress of magic?

However, I must make the effort of presenting the few known elements, to better understand what magical force is said to hide so close to the Capital.

THE INVISIBLE ISLAND

We know for certain that Circe lives in the province of Italia. In addition, she seems to have a strong bond with Latium, as legends claim she is the mother of the god Faunus, although it is as of yet unknown whether these are just local traditions. All the ancient authors, however, agree that she reigns over the island of Aeaea, located somewhere in the Mare Tyrrhenum, though its exact location is still unknown. Some say it is off of Tarracina, others that it is one of the Pontia or Pandataria islands, and Strabo even says it is Cape Circaeum.

In truth, none of them is right, as visiting the promontory of the Circaeum or Pandataria Island even once is enough to realize that such a place could never have been the home of a goddess.

The descriptions given by poets speak of a fertile land, where countless herbs, both magical and not, grow free, used by the witch for her potions. At the center of the island are supposed to be orchards, too, full of the rarest medicinal herbs, with Mercury, the very messenger of the gods, bringing her the most special specimens from all over the world. The island seems to be inhabited by animals that anywhere else are greatly-feared predators, here calm and domesticated. Her home, at the center of the island, is a palace worthy of a queen.

The ancient stories, however, seem to point out that the island was once not impossible to be found, as numerous sailors wound up on its shores by chance, though after those mythical times nobody was ever able to find it.

It is believed that the witch wove a spell that hides it from human sight, meaning it is only invisible, not intangible. Anybody who winds up there can touch its earth, but it is not known what effects crossing that veil have on human senses. Perhaps for the visitor nothing changes, like crossing a curtain, or maybe their perception dwindles, as if in thick fog. So far, we do not know.

There are some castaways of dubious reliability who claim, devastated by thirst and many days spent under the sun, to have been shipwrecked on the beach of an unknown island at the center of the Mare Nostrum. Some have said to have received water and comfort from someone they could not remember, and, in spite of the great research made by the Empire, the idea that such a powerful creature lives in the sea we feel so intimately ours has been a constant thorn in the side of all the wise consuls and Emperors who have guided Rome. In fact, it does not seem to be chance that the main base of the Imperial fleet is in Cape Misenum, in Campania (see page 20), a short distance away from the waters where the island of Circe is rumored to be.

To this day, however, the mystery has not been solved yet.

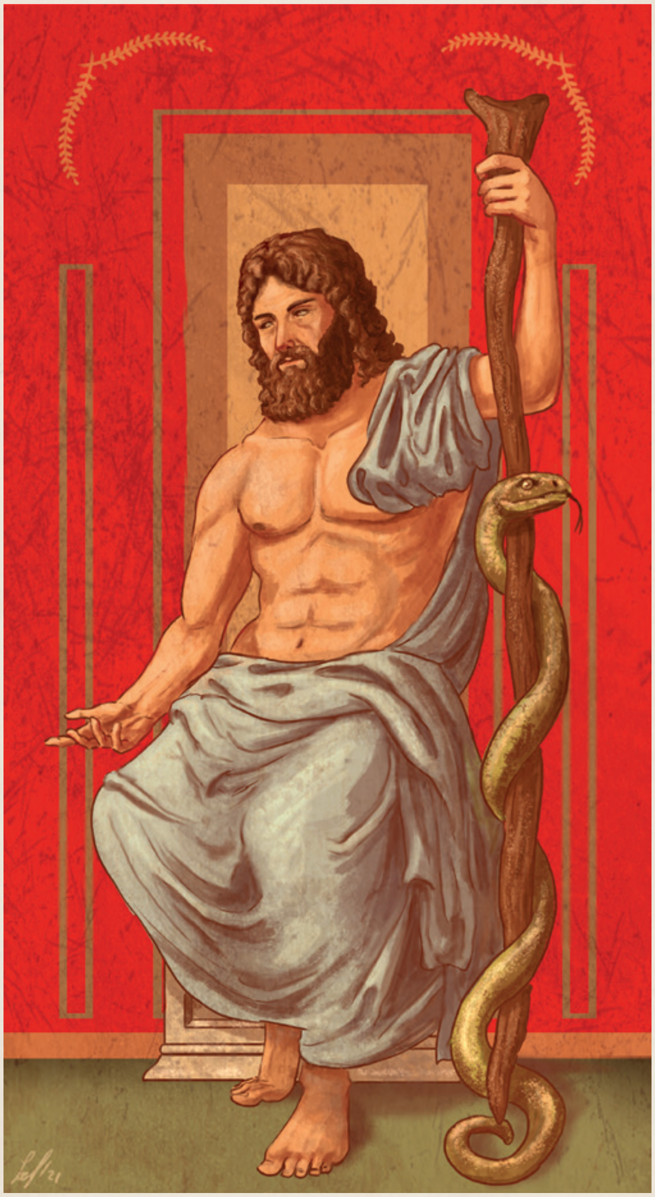
THE MAGIC OF CIRCE

It is commonly said that Circe practices magic, but the majority of the available information about what kind comes from poetic works, famous for their lack of precision. Overall, it is relatively obvious Circe practices natural magic through herbs, both magical and not, and potions. It is impossible to know which herbs Circe uses in her potions, or how to brew them, but, curiously enough, the only one we know of is one that officially does not exist, *moly* (see page 182), so powerful only gods use it. In addition to Circe, in fact, we know that only Mercury had knowledge of its use, giving it to Ulysses to resist Circe's spells. Is this a powerful antidote, then? Or does this *moly* have other effects? It is impossible to know.

It should be noted, however, that the potions of Circe do not seem to be powerful enough to conjure magical effects on their own, leading our experts to believe she must say magical words to harness their power, or use an unknown magical item, traditionally identified as a wand.

THE MAGICAL WAND

Magic wands are rare tools, supposedly owned only by deities, radically different from scepters or other items that represent power. Wands are tools to channel magical energy, and can perhaps be compared only to the litui of the Augurs (see the *Encyclopaedia Arcana*). Being so rare, nobody could ever study them directly, and all the information we have about them is from a few texts or ancient depictions. Therefore, their exact power is unknown, although so far evidence has hinted at transmutation.



In addition to Circe, the ancient texts report others using wands:

- **Diana**. According to the poet Ovidius, the goddess Diana is supposed to have used a wand to turn the sisters of Meleager, the slayer of the Calydonian Boar, into birds as they mourned the death of their young brother.
- **Asclepius**. The God of Medicine is always portrayed with a staff around which coils a serpent, a wand with which to heal any disease. The staff of Asclepius must not be confused with the caduceus of Mercury.
- **Mercury**. The god is always portrayed bearing the caduceus, a staff crowned with a pair of wings around which coil two serpents (instead of just one, like Asclepius'). This item is well known, as it appears in all the depictions of the god, although its nature is not easy to understand. The only evidence in this sense is given by great Homer, who in the Iliad says his wand put people to sleep and woke them, allowing them to travel about the realm of dreams. Other interpretations replace slumber with death, claiming Mercury leads souls to the afterlife with that wand.
- **Minerva**. Homer once again comes to our aid. The goddess used her golden wand to disguise Ulysses as an old man when he reached Ithaca, so the suitors of his wife Penelope could not recognize him, returning him to his original appearance with the same tool. Our Ovidius, on the other hand, writes that with a wooden wand, Minerva turned Arachne into a spider to punish her for challenging her skill in weaving.

I must also add that the Egyptian goddess Isis is often portrayed with a "scepter" in her hand, as Queen of the Sky. If one considers that she is the Goddess of Magic, too, it is unlikely for this item to not have magical properties of any kind.

For the description of Circe's wand, see page 182.

CIRCE, MISTRESS OF MAGIC

Circe is a goddess, not a witch, which is lost on the masses who, confused by centuries of legends and stories, call her the latter. A magician or witch is a human being who is capable of manipulating to some degree the supernatural forces that writhe in the world, while Circe, instead, does not belong to the human sphere entirely. She is divine, the daughter of one of the Titans, the gods that ruled the universe before Jupiter settled the heavens with his divine family.

The father of Circe is none other than Helios, the Titan who drives the solar chariot, whom we worship as Sol Invictus, and her mother is Perse, a nymph, daughter of the Titan Ocean. Because of this illustrious parentage, Circe was born with great magical powers, and so were her brothers and sisters. Her older sister Pasiphaë married the king of Crete, Minos, and was the mother of the monstrous Minotaur. Her younger brother Aeëtes, king of Colchis, kept the Golden Fleece for a long a time, fathered the witch Medea, and, according to some, even Angitia, enchantress goddess of the Marsi (see page 117). Lastly, her older brother Perses was king of Colchis, usurping the throne of Aeëtes, and for this was eventually killed by Medea to avenger her father.

The magical might of Circe is a precious gift for sure, but her story teaches us that it can also be a curse. It is no coincidence that powerful Circe has not left her island for centuries. She is trapped there, confined by Jupiter when, still a maiden, she turned her rival in love into a monster. The sea god Glaucus asked of her a potion to make the nymph Scylla fall in love with him, but Circe, secretly in love with him, gave him a poison he was to pour where Scylla used to swim. The pharmakon did not kill the nymph, inflicting upon her a fate worse than death, as she turned into the terrible monster that presently lives below the channel between Sicilia and Italia (see page 54).

Relegated to her island, Circe spent much time meditating on her mistakes and refining her craft, learning to use herbs, mixing elixirs and singing magic into them, and fashioning the wand with which she channels her magical might. She became a different person, one with a strong sense of justice. For centuries she took in shipwrecked crews and lost travelers, healing them with her arts before sending them back home, safe and sound, though many could not look past her beauty and her solitude. Thinking they could easily best a young, defenseless woman, they gave in to their own lusts and desires and, as such, were turned into animals by the goddess.

One day, from the sea came Ulysses, king of Ithaca, returning from the Trojan War, on his way back home, forced by the hostility of the gods to wander the Mare Nostrum, facing countless dangers. Cast onto the shores of Aeaea, Ulysses had his men explore the island. They soon saw the palace of Circe, made the mistake so many had made before them, and were turned into pigs. As they had not returned, Ulysses went after them. Circe tried to turn him, too, but he, warned by the god Mercury, had chewed on the leaves of the magical *moly* herb, which had made him immune to the arts of Circe. Thanks to this, Ulysses could meet the mistress of the island and ask of her generously granted shelter. She even returned his companions to their human form.

Ulysses spent a long time on Circe's island, safe from the hostility of the gods, but eventually he was bound to resume traveling. Circe, instead, remained on her island and raised their child, Telegonus.

Circe
Degree of Danger: 4
Value: DV12
1 die: De Bello, De Corpore, De Societate, Hit Points
2 dice: De Natura, De Societate (Deceit, Seduction), Ratio
3 dice: De Magia, De Natura (Herb Lore), Sensibilitas
Hit Points: 12
Weapons: None
Protections: None

- *Special Abilities:* Acute Senses, Poison* (2DV)
- *Magic Powers:* Enchantment* (2DV), Healing* (2DV), Illusion* (2DV), Immortality, Metamorphosis*, Paralysis* (2DV), Terror* (2DV)

** Most of Circe's special abilities and magic powers portray the effects of her potions. To activate the powers and the abilities with an asterisk (*), Circe must first have her target drink the equivalent potion, the effect activating as soon as the victim imbibes the potion or when Circe sees fit.*

BENEVENTUM, CITY OF MAGICAL MYSTERIES

Beneventum is a city strongly related to magic. Its foundation is attributed to a hero in possession of a mythical item, the Greek hero Diomedes, king of Argos, as he returned from the Trojan War. He had with him the tusks of the Calydonian Boar, a beast of extraordinary might that had devastated the region around the Greek city of Calydon before being slain by Diomedes' uncle, Meleager. These ancient relics were used as symbols of the city, the two-foot-long crescent moons on its main gates.

THE SIGNS OF ISIS

Some, however, whisper that the two crescents are not tusks, but actual crescent moons, proving the bond between the city and the moon goddess Isis.

The case of Beneventum is unusual. The city is pervaded with the symbols of the cult of the Egyptian goddess, in spite of being absolutely unrelated to Aegyptus. Many deny there is anything more than what it looks like, after all Isis is extremely popular all over the Empire, with even Rome having numerous temples to her. The cult was encouraged by Emperor Domitianus, a devotee of Isis and the one who authorized the construction of many temples in Rome. So, this peculiar situation could simply be dismissed as imported tradition. However, as I will attempt to explain shortly, the matter is much more complex.

You must first consider the great number of sacred items somehow tied to the cult of Isis in private homes and in temples and other public buildings, a collection second only to those in immensely larger cities such as Rome or Alexandria. It is also worthy of notice that all of these items and monuments come from Aegyptus and are not copies of Italic or Roman make. Additionally, every house features the *nyet*, the knot of Isis (see *Encyclopaedia Arcana*), painted on its door, and every public building has one or more statues of Isis, right beside those of the official cult. Sistrums and other musical instruments related to the cult sound everywhere, the local women fetch water from public fountains with vessels identical to those the goddess bears in her statues, numerous ladies carry not just fans, but also small sticks carved like the scepter of Isis, et cetera.

The city claims a grandiose *Iseum*, a temple to Isis, willed by Domitianus, built with a grandeur worthy of Rome. Columns imported from Aegyptus decorate its front, their inner beams gleaming with gold and bronze. Worthy of notice are the two red granite obelisks that dwarf bystanders at the access staircase. Taller than nine feet, they were placed on considerable marble bases to make them look even more monumental. Those, too, were made in Aegyptus and are covered in hieroglyphs praising Isis as the "Mistress of Beneventum". I do not have to say this, but this is definitely out of the ordinary.

THE *DIANARAE* OF BENEVENTUM

After mentioning this city, I must dedicate this matter some space, for the list of Beneventan anomalies is not yet over.

Here, women are held in high regard, although most likely out of fear rather than respect. Nothing is said openly, but how the locals stare at each other gives it away. Travelers report, for example, that in any taberna work many women, usually the wife of the owner and their daughters. They do not talk much with strangers and seem to embody the model of the honest matron, smiling, remaining silent, and letting their male relatives speak. However, the relationship between men and women seems to be based on a tension of some sort, hinting at a different balance of power than what it looks like at first glance. Many men, before answering a question from a traveler, look at their women, as if asking permission, who on the other hand, often issue commands with just their gaze, and nobody seems to hesitate, no matter the order.

Only those Benenventans who have moved elsewhere can solve this issue. They claim the city is built on a place of magic, that their women are all witches or charmers, and that the cult of Isis there has a darker side than anywhere else in the Empire. These local spell weavers seem to be called *dianarae*, as followers of the threefold goddess of magic Isis/Diana/Hekate, or *ianarae* in the local dialect.

These are just rumors, probably unreliable because they are spread by soldiers far from home for too long, or husbands broken by a divorce.

Our troops stationed in the area report nonetheless that at night things change. The otherwise tranquil town animates with incomprehensible chants, lights sometimes shine from behind closed curtains, and in the streets one can meet lonely women. The patrols at first pulled them aside, believing they were in distress or, on the contrary, up to no good. However, then, a superstition spread among the soldiery that the local women are witches out to perform their magical rituals at night. Woe betide those who try to stop them! They would be hexed, suffering many greatly unpleasant afflictions, so to this day some of those who have served around Beneventum claim to have suffered from sudden gut diseases, to have lost their hair, or even to have been deprived of their virile strength, so important in lovemaking. However, no evidence to back any of these claims has been presented yet, our physicians who visited these soldiers finding nothing out of the ordinary. Alas, it is well known how hard it is to eradicate superstition, so much so that the only positive reactions were elicited only by the cleansing ritual of an Augur, who instantly healed the "sick", only reinforcing the theory of the hex.

PROTECTION FROM THE HEX OF THE *DIANARAE*

The tradition of Beneventum claims there is a specific gesture that protects one from the local witches, made by forming a circle with the thumb and index finger of the left hand, similar in shape to an eye, and directing it to the source of the hex. It is a simple motion, perhaps the reason why it was so easily overlooked. The locals do not yield that information easily, so to learn of this small ritual one must first be either a Beneventan or well-versed in the Italic legends and folklore, or be an excellent observer.

One can then apply either of the following:

- a) This information is born of study and previous knowledge. The character must roll **De Magia** (DT 9) *and* earn a high Degree of Success:

I Degree of Success	II Degree of Success	III Degree of Success
There is a simple method to fight the local hex.	The method to fight the local hex is a special gesture.	The character knows exactly what the gesture is.

- b) Deducing the correct ritual by observing the locals. The character must pass a **De Societate** roll (DT 9) *and* earn a high Degree of Success:

I Degree of Success	II Degree of Success	III Degree of Success
The locals must have a system to fend off the hex...	The locals often make a gesture with their fingers.	The character finds out exactly which gesture and can make it easily.

In this latter case, a II Degree of Success grants a deeper insight into the local traditions and allows discovering that specific gesture, lowering the Difficulty Threshold of the next roll to 6.

THE MAGICAL WALNUT TREE

Allow me to add the following news, as absurd as they may look, for the sake of thoroughness. Legend has it that around Beneventum is a tree sacred to the followers of Isis, the rumors claiming it is an old, enormous walnut. This fact is unusual, for we do not know of that plant being in any way connected to the cult of Isis, usually portrayed with a crown of or bearing palm leaves, surrounded by lotus flowers. As such, this one must be a local tradition of a variant of the cult of the goddess of Beneventum.

The followers of the cult are said to gather twice a year under this tree to celebrate special unknown rites. Although we do not know what happens there, the few who have ever mentioned this occurrence have always warned against the violence the celebrants would unleash on any unsanctioned onlooker. The women, possessed by the goddess, have supernatural strength and can kill an adult man with their bare hands, and some of the higher-ranking initiates are even capable of flight. The bystanders who have plummeted to their doom from the top of a tree or hill are countless.

I report all this information for the sake of completeness, but with some caution.

THE CITY OF WITCHES – ENCOUNTERS TABLE

Roll 1d10 whenever appropriate. These encounters can happen during both the day and night.

D10 Roll	Event
1	**Beautiful women.** The Custodes meet unusually attractive girls, who give them mischievous looks. If the group joins them, the men of the town will look at the characters with suspicion, for they believe those girls to be witches. In truth, they just want fun.
2	**Some luck.** A girl with a small stand on wheel sells bouquets made of corn ears, thin palm leaves, walnut twigs, and red and white flowers. Her wares are cheap, and she is nice. She attempts to gain the attention of the Custodes, saying her bouquets are lucky, and, although not technically true, many in town use them as sacred offerings. Being seen with some helps the Custodes in earning the trust of the locals.
3	**A magical snack.** A street vendor offers nuts, somewhat dirty and not really inviting, claiming they come from an exceptional tree. Since they have magical properties, they were not taken from the tree, but picked from the ground out of respect, hence the dirt. She asks a whole sestertius per nut, given their magical nature. Eating one of them gives the character a deeper understanding of the local affairs (reducing the difficulty of those rolls by 1 level) and can help in resolving a complicated situation the Custodes are involved with (at the discretion of the Demiurge).
4	**Better not to trust.** The characters are approached by an aging woman, who claims to be able to grant great powers in exchange for a paltry favor (tens of sestertii are not exactly paltry). If they accept, the woman leads them at night to a necropolis and begins mixing strange potions with many unusual ingredients, such as metal plates carved with unknown symbols, splinters from the hulls of shipwrecks, corpse parts, nails with flesh still hanging from them, and even dried blood. Once drunk, the potion has no effect other than causing its drinker to lose 1d6 Pietas and suffer from fits of diarrhea that inflict the *Debilitated* condition.
5	**A child to avoid.** The Custodes pass by a girl not older than three who stares intently at them before pointing her finger at the group. If they do not know how to fend the hex off, for the next 2d6 days they lose the Fate Roll and are plagued by misfortune.
6	**Against the hex.** A middle-aged man calls for the Custodes at his humble abode and, once he is sure of not being seen, warns them to beware of women. In that exact moment, an old woman looks out of a window and stares intently at the man, who immediately raises against her his left hand, joining thumb and index into a circle. After that, the woman returns inside, and the man vehemently drives the characters out of his home, without telling them that the gesture he just made is a powerful charm against the local hex. A careful observer, however, can deduce much from what happened (see the *Protection from the Hex of the Dianarae* sidebar).
7	**The priestess.** A woman dressed in a white robe tied in an unusual knot on her chest moves silently in the street. She is a priestess of Isis. The locals part around her to let her pass, as some bow. If the Custodes do the same, she stops in front of them, smiles, and resumes walking. Behind her, on the ground, the Custodes spot a small redstone pendant that reminds them of the knot of Isis painted on the doors of the Beneventan houses. It is a lucky charm (once per day, it allows a character to repeat their last roll, keeping the new result).

8	**A warning.** The Custodes meet a man and a woman, evidently husband and wife. He addresses the group with courtesy, but the urgency in his tone is evident, and warns them that an epidemic is spreading in the area. He encourages them to leave before something happens to them, too. If the Custodes ask questions, the woman touches the arm of the husband and they leave in a hurry. The following night, the Custos with the lowest Vigor score falls ill. If the group leaves the area immediately, they heal, otherwise they remain *Sick* (DT 9) until they pass the Vigor roll.
9	**Punishment**. The Custodes are presented with a strange scene; a young lad, who had heavily mocked an old woman until a moment before, is assaulted by a dozen women with scepter-like wands and left bleeding on the ground. The men around there leave in a hurry. If the Custodes help the boy, the following night they are attacked by (1.5:1) Wolves, wherever they are.
10	**A secret meeting**. The Custodes note some women unassumingly headed for the forest. If they follow them along a winding and uneven path, they are led to a clearing with a giant and ancient tree. Numerous other women from at least a dozen different villages wait for them there, and, as soon as they all have gathered, they begin dancing frantically, as if possessed. Being discovered there means being torn apart by the zealous mob.

THE MOUNTS OF ANGITIA

Between the peaks of the Italic heartland, Regio IV, lives a people of Samnite descent, traditionally well-versed in magic, the Marsi. Their “capital” is still the town of Alba Fucens, although in ancient times their spiritual heart were Lake Fucinus and the grove sacred to their main goddess, Angitia. The Marsi are also known as Marruvii, after their first capital Marruvium, on the shores of Lake Fucinus.

THE MARSI, EXPERTS IN POISONS AND MAGIC

The Marsi owe their name and birth to the ver sacrum, splitting from the great Samnites with the rite of the “sacred spring” (see page 103) and placing themselves under the protection of the god Mars, after whom they were named. Because of this origin, they have always been great warriors, a mighty foe even for the proud legions of Rome.

However, it is not their martial prowess that made the Marsi the stuff of legends, but their skill in handling venomous snakes and poison, to the point where in common parlance, now, the word *marsus* is synonym for “snake charmer”. Folklore goes as far as claiming that the Marsi even have the power of turning into these animals.

Legends aside, the Marsi are truly as adept in handling poisons and relative pharmaka as they are said to be, many being wandering potion or ingredients merchants. They work under Imperial control, and many of them help the most skilled physicians of the Capital and other important institutions. Some Marsi, also, are healers.

They are an insular people, and, even though itinerant traders, they yearn to return to their beloved mountains more than anything else. Here, they can freely practice their ancient traditions, whcih they have kept following even so many centuries after entering the influence of Rome.

Although subject to Roman law and her magistrates, they still bow to the authority of a local community chieftain, called *meddix* in their ancient language.

As to their religion, the Marsi are tenaciously loyal to their ancient gods and do not pay much attention to those of the official cult. They worship Feronia, ancient mother of Latini and Samnites (see page 71), the divine twins Castor and Polux, and above all Angitia, goddess of magic and healing.

THE *LUCUS ANGITIAE*

Angitia rules over the *Lucus Angitiae* (Sacred Grove of Angitia), a sacred grove somewhere in the mountains around Lake Fucinus. This grove-shrine is difficult for foreigners to reach, being located in a small valley infested with snakes, loyal companions and protectors of the goddess, believed to be descendants of the serpent Python, chased by Apollo from Graecia to these mountains. The *Lucus Angitiae* is a wild shrine, where the most skilled healers serve the goddess, well versed in all poisons and, according to some, capable of turning into snakes.

At the center of the grove is a magical spring whose waters are believed to be the antidote to any poison or venom. It flows from a high rock, a small acropolis of sorts, on top of which stands a temple dedicated to Angitia. It is a unique building in the Empire, having in front of its entrance a porch borne only by one column at its center, its sides supprted by the two long sides of the temple. In the porch are two well-spaced entrance doors, and the faithful can access the temple from its twin staircase, at the foot of which flows the sacred spring that pools further down below.

Around the small acropolis are a few buildings dedicated to the priests, welcoming pilgrims and the sick, preparing potions, and raising both venomous and non-venomous snakes. These animals are not confined indoors, but can wander freely around the shrine and the grove.

ANGITIA, GODDESS OF MAGIC

Angitia is often considered a goddess capable of great magical destruction, with her very name echoing the word *anguis*, "serpent", aggression, poison, and death. Silius Italicus, a lawyer and poet who lived back in the days of the Divine Claudius, wrote the following in his *Punica* (Book VII, lines 495-501):

Angitia, daughter of Aeëtes, discovered first malicious herbs,
they say, and handled with skill
poisons and tore the moon from the sky;
screaming she halted rivers and,
calling them, stripped the mountains of their forests.

These verses sum up those that have always been defined as her most dangerous traits, such as her deep knowledge of venomous herbs and poisons, her magical might capable of altering the course of the heavenly spheres, and her voice that can stop rivers and even strip mountains of their magical forests.

What is not said in those verses is that she is also a healer, marking her as an ambivalent mistress of nature, capable of gifting life as well as spreading death, her herbs both poisons and medicine, depending on the dosage. The spring inside her sacred grove is commonly held to be capable of neutralizing any poison.

However, it is also true that Angitia, unlike many other Italic goddesses whose domain covers only nature, is also mistress of magic. The legends claim she is related to the famous witches Medea and Circe, possibly confirmed by Silius Italicus, who mentioned Angitia as "daughter of Aeëtes", Circe's younger brother (see page 113), who was as versed in magic as his sister. The daughter of Aeëtes, Medea, was another powerful sorceress. However, the relationship between Angitia, Medea, and Aeëtes is uncertain. Some say Aeëtes had two daughters, both powerful spellcasters, Medea and Angitia. Others, instead, believe Medea and Angitia to be the same person. According to the myth, Medea helped the Greek hero Jason in obtaining the Golden Fleece, the mantle of the mythical magical ram of King Aeëtes. In exchange for her help, Jason married Medea and took her with him, although not for long. Jason got rid of Medea to marry another woman, causing the wrath of the sorceress, who killed their own children. Before she could be punished for her crime, Medea escaped on a flying chariot pulled by dragons that her father had sent her and took refuge in Italia, in the territory of the Marsi, who worshiped her like a goddess as Angitia.

The magic of Angitia is not yet entirely understood. If we are to trust the poet, her power is natural, consistent with her attribution as healer and poisoner, confirming her rule over the natural world, including the earth, rivers, and forests. As for the moon, I must point out that it has always been related to magic and witch-goddesses, therefore it is possible that by "tore the moon from the sky", Italicus means she was powerful enough to alter the reading of the stars while divining.

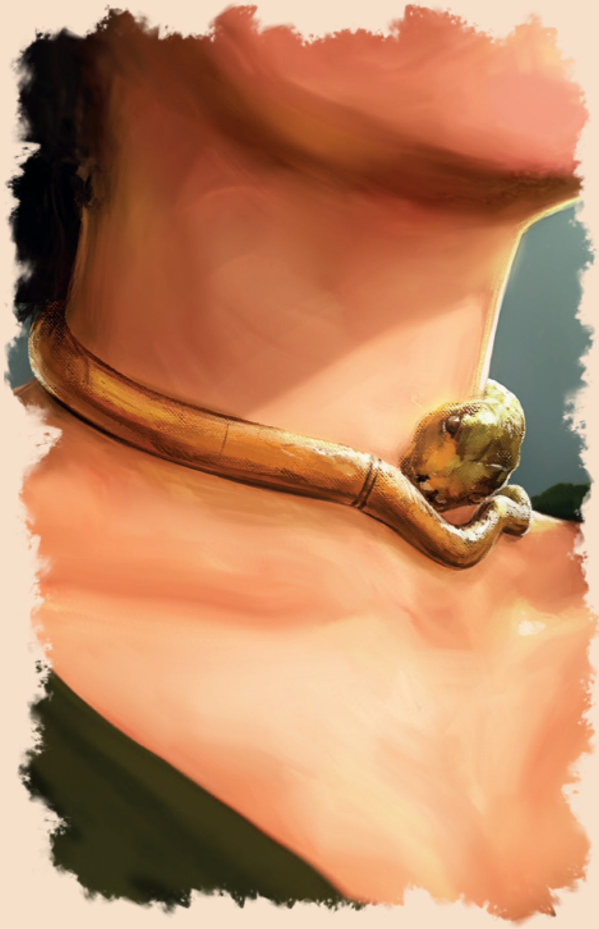
THE PRIESTS OF ANGITIA

Anyone among the Marsi can become a priest of Angitia, for there is no social group dedicated to holding sacred office. Even so, all the Marsi are bound to serve at the Lucus Angitiae at least once in their life. Both men and women are admitted, as long as they are pure Marsi, for their talents with snakes and poisons are innate and cannot be learned.

All those who serve at the shrine to Angitia are considered soldiers in the service of the goddess and are capable of fighting to defend her domain or their own persons. The following passage from the *Aeneid* of Vergilius (book VII, lines 750-755) describes Umbrus, priest of the Marsi (here addressed with their ancient name of Marruvii), who takes part in the battle between Latini and Rutuli:

Then here comes strongest Umbrus,
priest of the Marruvi, sent by King Ankippus,
his helm wreathed in fecund olive.
He of the poison breathing kin of vipers and hydras
could give slumber with but a wave of the hand and song,
and calmed their wrath and healed their bite with his art.

The priests of Angitia do not have a specific dress, but can be easily spotted by the necklace that looks a snake coiling around their neck. It can be bronze or silver, but leather ones have been seen, too, with some being so well-made they look like actual snakes coiling around the priest's neck, giving credence to the rumor that each has a familiar that they hide as jewelry.



Angitia Priests
Average Value: DV6
1 die: Ratio
2 dice: De Bello, De Corpore, Hit Points, Sensibilitas
3 dice: De Magia, De Natura (Snakes, Poisons)
Hit Points: 12
Weapons: Spear (Damage 6)
Protections: None

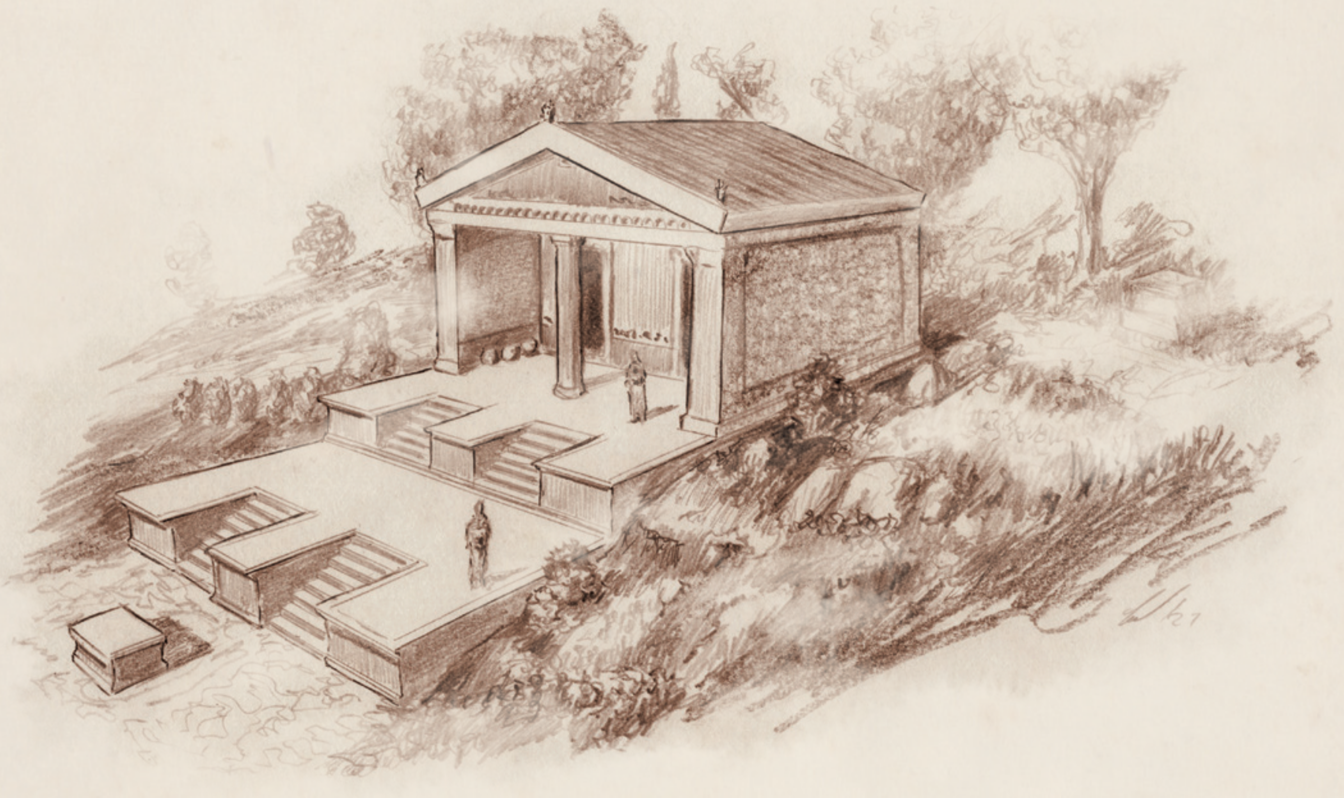
- *Special Abilities:* Poison (2DV)
- *Magic Powers:* Fate Roll
- *The tip of any priest weapon is always soaked in poison of snake, which causes the condition of Poisoned (va in italics) to anyone who suffers at least one damage*

MOUNTS OF ANGITIA – ENCOUNTERS TABLE

Roll 1d10 whenever appropriate. These encounters can happen during both the day and night.

D10 Roll	Event
1	**The house of serpents.** The Custodes move through a village of a few wooden huts, its people gaunt and poor. In this squalor, however, they see a shack, this one well-kept and with a fence decorated with flowers. After a while, two children enter, holding a live rat by the tail. If the Custodes ask about it, they are told it is the house of the goddess and a sacred building. In truth, it is used to raise serpents that the local community considers sacred. Whoever were to disturb or, gods forbid, kill, any of the animals would be immediately attacked.
2	**The cauldron.** The Custodes meet a nice girl sitting in front of a small fire (either in a village or in the wilderness), over which she is intently boiling something in a terracotta pot. Every now and then she smells the contents of the pot and then adds a pinch of minced herbs from a cloth bag. If asked about it, she proudly answers that it is the first time she has managed to prepare that brew all on her own, without her mother. It is only after a while that the group realizes she is making soup, not a magic potion!
3	**The snake hunter.** From the forest comes a man with a twig basket on his shoulders. He greets the group, but does not seem to be willing to stop and chat. If the Custodes stop him for a few questions, he is evidently ill-disposed and says he is in a hurry. On a successful **Sensibilitas** roll (DT 6), an attentive character realizes the basket emits faint rustling and hissing sounds. The man is a serpent hunter, a "snaker", an adept in recognizing poisons in any form they come (powder, liquids, etc.) and the danger posed by snakes. He can give useful information to the group (**De Societate**, DT 6), but if bothered may even drop the basket, releasing (1:1) Venomous Snakes to attack the group.
4	**A woodswoman?** A strong woman with an imposing air to her carries timber on her shoulders. At her belt is an axe, crude but with a shining and well-sharpened edge, evidently well-used. She is dressed simply, but of good make, and if asked, she says she is a woodswoman. On a successful **Ingenium** or **Sensibilitas** roll (DT 6), a character spots a snake around her neck, under her clothing. The woman is also a priestess of Angitia and uses the axe as a weapon as well as for timber. She is not aggressive, but dealing with her requires care.
5	**The healer.** An affable man is cutting cloth into strips for bandages, with a small wooden box filled with neatly ordered bottles of different colors near him. He is a healer. He will not provide any information on the shrine of Angitia or other "delicate" topics for the Marsi, but is more than willing to help in other ways.
6	**The sacred river.** The Custodes reach a river opening through the rocks. It is possible to cross it by stepping from slippery stone to slippery stone, passing a **Coordinatio** or **De Corpore** roll (DT 6). Those who fall, however, are not as unlucky as they would think. The water is magical, healing all damage, and increasing their Vigor score by 2 for 2d6 hours.
7	**Serpents' pass.** The Custodes reach a narrow gorge that is the only passage between two small vales. The group can only pass in single file, but as soon as they begin moving through, they realize that the walls and the end of the pass are covered in snakes. By moving, the snakes make the ground unstable and may cause some to lose their grip (**Coordinatio** or **De Corpore** roll, DT 6, to not fall prone and suffer 1d6 points of damage. Whoever falls prone is also immediately attacked by a Venomous Snake). If one the Custodes is *Poisoned*, within the hour the group meets one of the Marsi, who tends to their wound.

8	**The hermit.** The Custodes hear about an old hermit living in a nearby cave, known for his prophetic visions. If the Custodes visit him, bringing gifts, especially the sweet flatbreads with grape must he is particularly fond of, and pay the due respect, they earn his favor. If asked advice, the old man eats a mushroom, and after falling into a trance gives them an enigmatic but useful answer (its precise formulation is up to the Demiurge). In his cave grow many of these mushrooms, although to forage for them anywhere else the group must pass a **De Natura** or **Sensibilitas** roll (DT 9) per every hour of search. If somebody else ingests one, all they gain is intestinal pain for 1d3 days and the *Sick* condition.
9	**The potion maker.** In a hut in the grove lives a deranged woman, said to be a sorceress, rumored to be able to mix potions with mysterious effects. If the Custodes visit her, they notice a stark contrast between her chaotic demeanor and her tidy and orderly home. She owns bottles, flasks, and pots, in which she mixes philters and potions, mixing apparently random ingredients and muttering formulas in an unintelligible language. Three small glass bottles with cork stoppers hold potions of vibrant colors. Whoever drinks from them suffers one event from the *Magical Springs Table* (see page 108). Drinking a second one within 24 hours of the first adds only food poisoning (*Sick* condition) to the effect. If taken out of the grove, after a week the potion begins to fade and precipitate dark powders to the bottom of the bottles. After two, they are completely inert.
10	**The legendary bear man.** In a village, the Custodes learn that at night one of the inhabitants turns into a dangerous bear. Everybody is suspicious of their neighbor, but nobody has any idea who it actually is, preferring to hunker down in their homes, for the creature has ransacked more than one pantry, and even killed a man. If the Custodes stop to investigate, at night they may stumble into the creature. It is only a Bear, a particularly large, curious, and brave one (DV12), that with the dark descends from the mountains, looking for food outside the houses, and sometimes even inside. It is nothing supernatural, however.



ETRUSCAN MAGIC

When speaking of the magic typical of Italia, I have forgotten one key topic, so important that it deserves its own chapter. Among all the Italic people before the rise of Rome, the Etruscans were the best diviners, and everything we have learned from them is an enormous debt our Empire without end has towards this people.

The Etruscans wielded many forms of magic, not only divination, so I should spend a few words about the lore of this people.

THE ETRUSCAN LANDS

The origins of the Etruscan people are unknown. According to many Greek historians, Herodotos chief among them, they came from Lydia and first settled probably in the Padan Plain. Three centuries before the foundation of Rome, the Etruscans passed the Appennines and spread into central Italia, where they founded the cities of Arretium, Caere, Clusium, Cortona, Perusia, Rusellae, Tarquinia, Veii, Vetulonia, Volsinii, Volaterrae, and Vulci. It was those cities, on their own or allied with one another, that sent settlers all over Italia, building or conquering new settlements from Felsina to Pompeii, from Ariminum to Capua. Sea expeditions led to settling the island of Ilva for its iron mines, as well as Corsica. Rome herself fell into Etruscan hands, and there are still some who claim it was the Etruscans who turned it into a proper city, where before were only villages. Etruscan were the Roman kings Tarquinius Priscus, Servius Tullius, and Tarquinius the Proud. Two centuries after the foundation of Rome, the Etruscans were the widest spread, most powerful, and wealthiest people in Italia, its sailors and pirates the masters of the northern Tyrrhenum.

THE ETRUSCAN *SACRA TELLUS*

As the centuries passed, Etruscan presence consolidated between the Arnus and Tiberis rivers and the Tyrrhenic coast. This was for them the “sacred land”, identified with the sacred design of the “templum” of dividing the heavens into consecrated regions and divining the flight of birds through them. This system of subdividing and consecrating space, invented by the Etruscans, is also the basis of Roman divination doctrine (see page 126).

Well, the Etruscan Haruspices marked the borders of the sacred space of their land, although after so many centuries it is complex to tell them with certainty, a secret so well kept that now only the sands of the divine hourglass know.

However, our own Haruspices, inheriting part of the religious documents written under the Etruscan kings of Rome, were able to find out some information about how these magical alignments were traced.

Tradition identifies the northern most vertex of the “sacred square” with the mouth of the river Arnus, and its opposite as the mouth of the Tiberis. The Tiberis in particular was for centuries a cultural border, too, between us and the Etruscans. Even in the heart of the Urbs, the right bank of the Tiberis, the one to the north and facing the Etruscan land, was for a long time felt “foreign”, and for many centuries the urban region called *Transtiberim*, “beyond the Tiberis”, was the only one where it was legal to build temples of non-Roman deities. To the west, it is not difficult to assume that border passed through the island of Ilva, while matters complicate to the east. The common assumption is that it was somewhere around Perusia or Tuder, a town whose ancient name meant “border”. Of course, this is just speculation, and unfortunately the vagueness of this reconstruction prevents us from identifying a much more important point, the “mundus”, the center of the design. When one traces the templum to observe the heavens, the mundus is where one digs the sacred pit in which to pour the sacrificial offerings to the gods. When it comes to founding a city, in addition to the offerings, one must bury a tablet carved with the secret name of the city and its tutelary deity, the “*genius*”. Only by knowing these names is it possible to entirely conquer it, by summoning their genius and defeating them (for more information, see the *Encyclopaedia Arcana*). The mundus of the Etruscan lands has never been found, implying that, by this logic, this proud and wise people has never been conquered.

Also, knowing the exact location of the Etruscan mundus could offer another advantage; by pointing a drawing compass on the mundus and keeping the north and south points as limits, one traces a circle that includes the “sacra tellus”, the sacred Etruscan land. By pointing the compass to the east and west vertexes, the main axis on the sacred alignment, one would instead identify a smaller circumference that includes the area “sacra et sancta”, sacred and untouchable, the heart of Etruscan might.

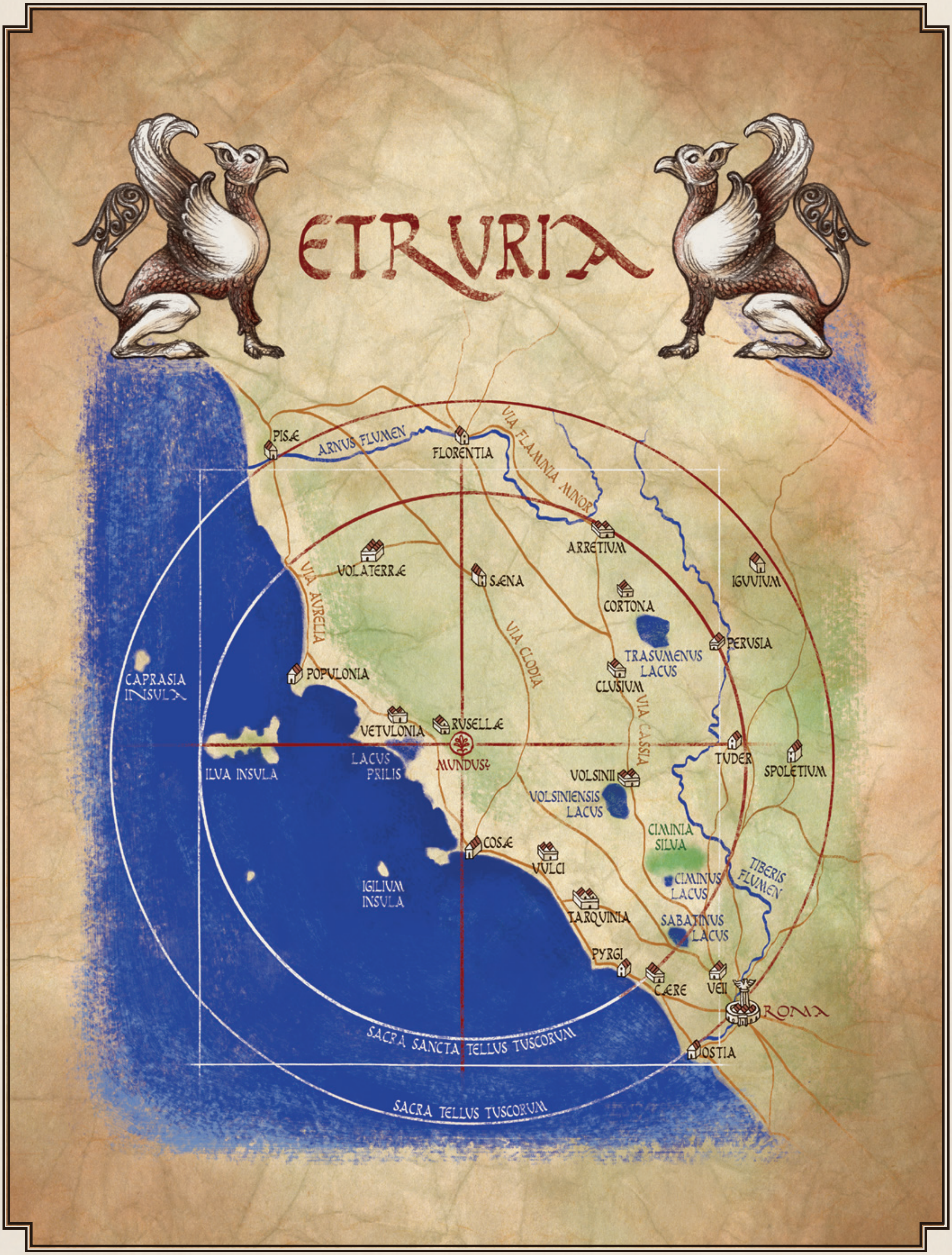
Should we ever be able to learn every geographical detail key to these designs, perhaps we could learn any still-unknown Etruscan secrets.

THE *DODECAPOLIS*

As much as the Etruscans have always been a people with one culture and language, still remembered to this day as “the Etruscan nation”, their politics were famous for their turmoil, with great wars raging often among their cities.

They were a “nation”, for they shared customs, but every city had its own government and was always independent of the others. Each city was ruled by a magistrate, who also administered spiritual matters, a king-priest of sorts, called *lucumon*, and other lesser temporary functionaries.

Among the many cities, however, twelve should be considered the same entity politically, if not even territorially. They are the


ETRVRIA
PISÆ
ARNVS FLVMEN
FLORENTIA
VIA FLAMINIA MINOR
ARRETIVM
VOLATERRÆ
SÆNA
IGVVIVM
CORTONA
VIA AVRELIA
VIA CLODIA
PERVSIA
TRASVMENVS LACVS
CLVSIVM
VIA CASSIA
CAPRASIA INSVLA
POPVLONIA
VETVLONIA
RVSELLÆ
TVDER
SPOLETIVM
ILVA INSVLA
LACVS PRILIS
MVNDVS
VOLSINII
VOLSINIENSIS LACVS
CIMINIA SILVA
COSÆ
VVLCI
CIMINVS LACVS
TIBERIS FLVMEN
IGILIVM INSVLA
TARQVINIA
SABATINVS LACVS
PYRGI
CÆRE
VEII
ROMA
OSTIA
SACRA SANCTA TELLVS TVSCORVM
SACRA TELLVS TVSCORVM

ones the geographer Strabo mentioned to have been founded by the mythical King Tyrrhenus, who joined in a Confederatio, an alliance born of equality and respect: the League of Twelve Cities, or *Dodecapolis*.

They were:

Latin Name	*Etruscan Name*
Arretium	*Artinia*
Caere	*Kyrsa*
Clusium	*Klevsin*
Cortona	*Curtun*
Perusia	*Perusna*
Rusellae	*Russel*
Tarquinia	*Tarkhnas*
Veii	*Veii*
Vetulonia	*Vethluni*
Volsinii	*Velzna*
Volaterrae	*Velathri*
Vulci	*Velch*

The representatives of the Dodecapolis used to gather once a year, at the Ides of August, in the shrine dedicated to Etruscan Voltumna (see below) to decide political strategies, defend against common enemies, deliberate on trade, and, most of all, perform powerful magical and religious rites. They then chose a leader, one who had authority over any local lucumo and for a year led the Dodecapolis. This magistrate was known in Etruscan as *zilath Rasnal*, "the leader of the Rasnal", for Rasnal or Rasenna was the name the Etruscans had for their own people.

THE *FANUM VOLTUMNAE*

The sanctuary (*fanum*) of the god Voltumna is today identified with an ancient shrine near Volsinii. Known as Vertumnus to us Romans, he is ancient enough to be counted among the Di Indigetes, although we were never particularly fond of him. Some even doubt such a god has ever existed, claiming instead it is an epithet of Tinia, the Etruscan equivalent of our Jupiter (see below).

Even among the locals, Voltumna seems today a functionally forgotten deity, commemorated only in one local festival, and not for religious reasons, this celebration supposedly kept almost artificially, as it attracts numerous visitors and lines the pockets of Etruscan traders. The charm of the ancient Etruscans is still alive among both the Roman patricians and the plebs. During the three days of the celebration, from the Ides of August to the third day after, hundreds of "Etruscan" amulets are sold, made of any material from gold to clay and embellished with "Etruscan" inscriptions that nobody can read. There is much trade in the famous black terracotta vases, the buccheri, although it seems that these vases are just terracotta painted black, the secret behind authentic buccheri being lost to time. This does not seem to bother anyone, however, and they enjoy a florid market.

In truth, the research of our Augurs claims that the exact location of the Fanum Voltumnae is still unknown, and that the shrine of Volsinii is not the one historically used for the great gatherings of the Dodecapoleis. This comes as no surprise, for it is perfectly understandable that they did not share such important information with one of their sworn enemies. The location of this shrine, then, is lost to the mists of the past. Some agentes in rebus claim to have found clues hinting at new attendance in numerous ancient Etruscan settlements, ascribing such movement to the secretive Brotherhood of the Twelve Peoples, rumored to be gathering at the actual Shrine of Voltumna (see page 158). Accurate investigations are now necessary.

THE THOUSAND-YEAR CYCLE

To the shrine of Voltumna is tied another tradition once widespread among the Etruscans, mentioned in the documents our Haruspices found in the ancient archives of this sacred alliance.

The Etruscans believed that human history, and that of their people specifically, was divided into cycles of a hundred years. According to an important prophecy, the Etruscan people were given ten such cycles, for a total of a thousand years. To keep an exact count, during their yearly gatherings at the Fanum Voltumnae, the representatives of the Twelve Cities used to set a gold-and-bronze nail inside of one of the buildings of worship.

The beginning of this thousand-year cycle is traditionally identified as three centuries before the birth of Rome, while one Haruspex calculated its end to coincide with the funeral of Julius Caesar, claiming an eagle rose from the funeral pyre of the legendary leader, and interpreting this omen as the dawn of a new era. The power of Rome was rising to the sky as the spirit of the Etruscan people declined, their ten centuries now over.

These documents, although apparently incomplete and difficult to interpret because they are written in Etruscan for the most part, seem to hint that somewhere in the shrine

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE ETRUSCAN PEOPLE

The Greek geographer Strabo claims the Etruscans came from Lydia, the heart of the modern province of Asia. The Greeks called them Tyrrheni, after Tyrrhenus, the king who guided them from from Lydia to Italia when a terrible famine struck their homeland under the rule of King Atys. So dire was their situation that the Lidii had enough to eat only every other day, so when they did not have food, they tried to distract their minds from the pangs of hunger by inventing many games, from knucklebones to ball and dice. It was by rolling a die that the king made the fateful decision that would involve us Italics, too, choosing to split his people into two halves, and send one searching for a new land. He entrusted the command of the expedition to his son Tyrrhenus, his people determined with the die. It is said this choice was not random, for the die was said to be magical and allow accurate predictions, identified by some with the mythical die of Julius Caesar (see page 110).

Once in Italia, the Tyrrheni grew so well-accustomed to this new land that they became one of the major powers of the ancient world. They subdued most of their neighbors, including, it must be said, even us Romans. They halted the Carthaginian expansion on the Tyrrhenic coasts, the burning Celtic wrath in the Padan Plain, and the Greek colonization from the south of the peninsula. These deeds are all the more impressive if one considers that they never joined their efforts as one nation, but stayed divided into city-states, even when this lack of unity in the long run would prove their downfall. Their Italic subjects, such as Romans and Oscii, rebelled often, while on their borders pressed Greeks and Celts. The former were at first halted by an alliance with the Carthaginians, but in 229 AUC, the Etruscans lost the battle of Aricia to the Latini and their Cuman allies, losing much of their rule over Latium. In 243 AUC, an insurrection lead by Junius Brutus banished from Rome King Tarquinius the Proud, and with him all the Etruscans, the casus belli being an affront made to Lucretia, wife of Collatinus, by the son of King Sextus. Rome then became a republic, and came to dominate Latium after defeating the Latini at Regillus Lake (254 AUC). The Greeks defeated the Etruscans in a sea battle at Cumae (279 AUC), and eventually, during the IV Century AUC, the Gauls descended into Italia, devastating numerous cities.

From then on, the history of the Etruscan cities is continuous fighting, falling, rebelling, and once more yielding to Roman rule. While the Eternal City was on her way to becoming the mistress of the world, the Etruscan cities lost more and more importance and lands, the majority of them becoming part of Rome's holdings by the end of the VII Century AUC, in spite of a modicum of independence. They lost their autonomy with the Lex Julia of 664 AUC, gaining Roman citizenship in exchange, marking their full absorption into our culture. Back in the days of the Divine Augustus, the Etruscans were as Roman as everybody else, and spoke only Latin.

of Voltumna were set only 961 nails. The almost complete thousand-year cycle seems to confirm the exactness of this prediction. Although its 40 years yet to come were not taken well by some followers of the ancient Etruscan religion, as it seems they swore vengeance for the premature end of the cycle promised by their gods. I report this rumor for the sake of completeness, even if such animosity for a loss of just 40 years seems rather unrealistic.

THE *ETRUSCA DISCIPLINA*

We can claim, without fear of being proven wrong, that the Etruscans taught Rome everything about the relationship between humanity and the divine, commonly known as *Etrusca Disciplina*. This people, on the one hand, had a deeply ingrained sensitivity for the sacred, but on the other were also greatly gifted in practical matters. By making these two precious qualities meet, they recognized the patterns of the supernatural powers and found the rules to study, and even partially dominate, them. While their contemporaries still wandered in the darkness of fear of divine retribution and superstition, the Etruscans laid the foundations of a religious science that allowed them to exist and prosper for almost a millennium.

THE ETRUSCAN PANTHEON

The Etruscans, like us, worshiped many gods, some of them sharing traits with our own deities. Not for nothing was cultural exchange frequent in the Mare Nostrum in ancient times, with the Greeks, Etruscans, and then Romans coming to share the worship of many deities, such as those on the chart below:

Other gods, instead, were worshiped only by the Etruscans, and today their names have been forgotten, even by the old inhabitants of Etruria, replaced by the official cult. A forgotten god is often a cruel one, for ignorance does not beget tolerance, and they appear to be mostly tied to prophecy and the Underworld, fields in which the Etruscans were more knowledgeable than any other Italic people.

Let me show you.

A REFINED CIVILIZATION

Etruscan everyday life was refined and luxurious, their passion for beauty and the sweeter delights a painful contrast with our austere progenitors.

For the Romans of the republican period, the taste of the Etruscan aristocracy in jewelry, dances, and feasts was, in fact, incomprehensible, as was to them the freedom and authority of the Etruscan women, who dominated familial life and enjoyed celebrations, games, and other public occasions the same as their husbands. Such scandal, however, proved to be pointless. After so many centuries, Roman society considers normal many of the Etruscan behaviors it judged so sternly!

The refined Etruscan art had many admirers in Rome, although at first criticized by the conservatives. Sculpture, poetry, and jewel-making showed their Greek influence, but had a lively local twist to them. Statues and reliefs were mostly stone (although not marble) or terracotta, and their frescoes portrayed everyday life: banquets, games, duels, rituals, or other religious elements.

The Etruscans were master architects and engineers, devising the design of the Italic temple, shorter and more imposing than its Greek counterpart, as is visible in the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus on Capitoline Hill. They also built many great works, like sewage reclamation systems such as the Cloaca Maxima in Rome, and many aqueducts, of which we have inherited the secrets.

Their love for the beauty of life greatly inspired them in jewel-making, too, embossing, filigreeing, or stippling gold with a technique in which the Etruscans masters are unmatched still to this day. Other noteworthy works were made of bronze, ivory, and carved amber, and it seems that such apparently frivolous art was their source of inspiration for a kind of healing and cosmetic medicine. They learned to repair or replace rotten teeth by coating them in thin gold sheets or directly replacing them in ivory and gold.

Favorite still to this day is Etruscan pottery, especially the buccheri, vases made with a unique black clay, of which the composition is now unfortunately lost.

Etruscan Deity	Roman Equivalent	Greek Equivalent
Aita	Pluto	Hades
Aplu	Apollo	Apollo
Artume	Diana	Artemis
Fufluns	Bacchus	Dionysus
Herkle	Hercules	Herakles
Horta	Ceres	Demeter
Mae	Maia	Maia
Mania	Furies	Erinyes
Menrva	Minerva	Athena
Maris	Mars	Ares
Nethuns	Neptune	Poseidon
Satres	Saturn	Cronos
Selvans	Silvanus	-
Semia	Tellus	Gea
Sethlans	Vulcan	Hephaestus
Thesan	Aurora	Eos
Tinia	Jupiter	Zeus
Turan	Venus	Aphrodite
Turms	Mercury	Hermes
Uni	Juno	Hera
Usil	Sol Invictus	Helios
Vetisi	Veiovis	-

THE SECRET NAME OF A PEOPLE

The Etruscans are a famous people that for some reason are still partially mysterious. The proof is that we do not know their true name for certain. Many are the authors that cover their history, but each calls them differently.

It is said they were numbered among the ancient Pelasgi, who came from the east to the lands west of the Mare Nostrum, while according to Herodotos their original name is *Lidi*, for he thought they came from Lydia, now the heart of the Province of Asia. They took the name *Tyrrheni* when they settled Italia, in homage to King Tyrrhenus who led them in this long migration. The Greeks, then, called them Tyrrheni as well as *Tyrsenoi*.

The Latini, instead, called them *Tusci*, and the habit is so ingrained that the area once known as Etruria is still known to us as Tuscia, possibly a simplified version of the wider-spread term *Etrusci*.

Dionysios of Halicarnassus, historian and erudite who lived back in the times of the Divine Augustus, was the first to delve into the matter with a critical eye, drawing directly from Etruscan documents. It was he who suggested for the first time that the name of this people was a word in the Etruscan language, *Rasenna*, instead of something from the language of other people. Perhaps the most precise term is *Rasna*, which we have found in some historical texts about them, confirmed by the name of the great leader of the Confederatio of the Twelve Cities, the *zilath Rasna* or “leader of the Rasna”.

Progress on the matter, however, seems to have halted at that. After Dionysios of Halicarnassus, nobody has followed those tracks, save for, perhaps, Emperor Claudius, who dedicated much effort to the study of this people. Unfortunately, his enormous collection of Etruscan texts disappeared soon after his death.

CHARUN

The keeper of the Etruscan Underworld, he often appears as a winged, leering, blue-skinned demon, with a hooked nose and a short beard, wearing a small tunic with a cloak on his shoulders. His symbol is the maul, an enormous hammerhead on top of a long staff, which he uses to drive a nail into the door of a tomb to show that its inhabitant has left for the Underworld.

Charun oversees violent death, and often appears to those who are about to die, announcing their imminent demise. His is the task of ensuring that the soul passes to eternal damnation or to the Elysian Fields. He also protects tombs and burials, where he is often depicted on the doors to protect the slumber of the dead, defiling a tomb under his protection usually earning swift and violent retribution.

LASA

The Lasa are mysterious deities intimately connected to the magical land of Etruria, local nymphs with strong ties to divination, but for each is defined a series of specific attributes. In addition to their divining skills, they are young maidens of prodigious beauty, with special powers that allow them to both help and harm mortals.

They are:

- **Achununa**. A stern maiden, with long, black hair and a firm gaze, bearing a crown of oak leaves, with no qualms about letting others see her naked. She can be seen accompanying, as a friendly spirit, those leaders who perform brave and desperate deeds in battle, for she grants her protection only to soldiers and those with a valorous heart, punishing betrayals and the breaking of promises and oaths with swift retribution. She never manifests fully visible, letting her figure fade as if not made of material substance.
- **Racuneta**. Racuneta appears to be the wisest of the Lasa. Her face benign and understanding, she dresses in a long, light, and elegant tunic and carries a small alabaster jar. She is a healer who never refuses to help those in need, and is said to occasionally gift a few drops of the miraculous contents of her jar.
- **Sitmica**. She appears as a scantily-dressed maiden covered in transparent veils and bearing a spear. She loves forests, where she is often seen hunting, although she is timid and does not like the company of men, whom she tries to flee from in any way she can.
- **Thimrae**. The youngest of the Lasa, she loves to protect and accompany children and novices. She appears as a smiling maiden dressed in colorful clothes who fiddles with a mirror, happily chats with mortals, of whom she appreciates their company, and enjoys humor or pulling the occasional prank on those who address her too familiarly.
- **Vecuvia**. Also called Vegoia, she is said to be the leader of the Lasa, for, according to ancient legends of the Etruscan Haruspices, she gathered the prophetic rituals of the mysterious *Libri Haruspicini*. She looks like a blonde maiden dressed in a short, light tunic and bears a volumen, the scroll containing her prophetic works. She does not enjoy daylight, and prefers to manifest in the darkness of night or at twilight. Normally, she does not easily grant visions to those who ask her, but she is allegedly more sensitive towards the invocations of the Haruspices and other seers.

NORTHIA

A manifold and mysterious goddess, mistress of fateful events, we believe she is the Etruscan equivalent of capricious Fortuna. She is the companion of Voltumna and had her own temple inside the Fanum Voltumnae, where were set the nails that counted the “cycles”. Because of this, Northia is often portrayed as a large, decorated nail.

TARCHET (TAGES)

Child god, inventor of Haruspicina, his original Etruscan name was Tarchet, but he is now better known by his Latin variant, Tages. The information about this seer god is relatively reliable, provided in his *De Divinatione* by wise Cicero, who claims to have direct testimonies from ancient Etruscan books. Remember that back in his day, roughly five centuries ago, there were still scholars capable of speaking and writing Etruscan, common among the people of Etruria, so his information can be trusted. Cicero reports the legend of an Etruscan farmer who saw a healthy and lively child sprout from a ditch in the ground he was tilling, slightly deeper than usual. The child spoke like an old wise man and showed great knowledge of the divine. It was then decided to write down everything the child said, leading to the formation of the core of *Libri Haruspicini*, a priceless collection of rites, instructions, and knowledge for interpreting omens. The farmer, named Tarchon, became the first flamen of the Etruscan people, and an authority in religious matters.

Tages was so knowledgeable that he left many texts, although, alas, only some have made their way to us. So far, we have:

- **Libri Acheruntici**. This was a description of the Afterlife, its gods, and rituals to prevent or placate their wrath: exorcisms, invocations, and counter invocations. This work also included rituals dedicated to requesting the assistance of these deities in divination, but only a few passages are left, copied and translated in ancient times for Roman priests to study.
- **Libri Exercituales**. This was a collection of rituals and instructions on the ruling of armies, unfortunately lost. Some even believe it never even existed.
- **Libri Fatales**. This was a most precious compendium of mysterious rules and laws Fate applies to shape the destiny of individual human beings, and

the Etruscan people in general. Knowing these rules and laws could allow influencing the destiny of people and nations. Alas, this work is lost.

- **Libri Fulgurales**. This was a complete treatise on the powerful Etruscan art of controlling lightning. The work was in reality a collaboration between Tages and the Lasa Vecuvia. The work is now lost.
- **Libri Haruspicini**. Tages' main work, these books contain instructions on the execution of divination sacrifices and the related reading of the entrails of sacrificial animals at the base of Etruscan divination. During the Etruscan rule of Rome, this knowledge was passed to the priests of the Urbs and built upon by Rome. The work has arrived to us mostly undamaged, and now is in the possession of our Haruspices (see further down).
- **Libri Rituales**. These were extremely detailed reference books for all manner of both private and public rites. The work was lost, but numerous excerpts found their way into the ritual anthologies in use by our Augurs.
- **Ostentaria**. These were calendars and catalogs of prodigies (*ostenta*) that manifested in the glorious days of Etruscan power. Unfortunately, the work seems to have been lost.

TUCHULCHA

Demon from Hades, emissary of Charun, he is a demigod of vengeance and punishment who, similarly to the Greek Erinyes, harrows those who have committed crimes against natural or moral laws. Tuchulcha is as monstrous as his calling, his face twisted into a long beak like that of a bird of prey. He has long animal ears, two large serpents rising from his head, and claws like those of avian predators.

VANTH

The companion of Charun, she, too, bears messages of an unavoidable fate. Unlike Charun, however, she is less aggressive, instead ensuring mortals' lives their due. Like the Greek Moirai, she oversees the last moments before death, and often appears to the dying bearing a sword to cut the thread of life. She looks like a young, beautiful, and yet sad, winged woman, dressed in a long tunic pleasantly tied at her waist by a belt, ribbons crossing her chest, as well as embroidered footwear. Her characteristic attribute is the torch she presents unlit and upside down to the one whose death she has come to announce.

VOLTUMNA

The overlord of the Etruscan nation, whom Varo called "deus Etruriae princeps", they are the chief god of Etruria. Interestingly enough, however, Voltumna does not appear in any list of Etruscan deities that we know of. They are often mentioned by historians and scholars, but we do not have any first-hand accounts explicitly mentioning them. As we saw earlier, the Etruscan deity equivalent to our Jupiter seems to be Tinia, so why have the rumors of Voltumna's rule over the Etruscan pantheon made their way throughout the centuries with no factual foundation?

Voltumna is an elusive god, called by many names such as Veltune, Veltha, Vel, and even a Latin monicker, Vertumnus, one of the most ancient Di Indigetes. Their personality is often misleading, for they are a warlike god who loves action, duels, and blood bravely spilled, but at the same nurtures the earth with great care. We do not know their exact gender, for they take a feminine or masculine form at leisure, as well as that of a monstrous demon of the Underworld.

It is hard to say if Voltumna is indeed capable of all of this, or it is simply an Etruscan design to hide the details of their most powerful deity from external enemies. Knowing the true name of a god, much like that of a city, makes them vulnerable to kidnapping or conquest, so in this light it is only logical that any trace of this deity was intentionally removed, much like Voltumna's own shrine where the Etruscan people traditionally gathered.

HARUSPICINA

Among the many disciplines invented by the Etruscans to learn the will of the gods, the best known is without a shadow of a doubt Haruspicina, the reading of animal entrails. The name is a clear indication of the nature of this practice, since *har* means "liver" and *spicio* is the act of inspecting.

I call it "science" for a specific reason. The reading of animal entrails follows specific rules and procedures, presented with great precision in the texts of the Haruspices. Inspiration has nothing to do with it, as it is a long study with continuous practice that requires deep knowledge of the cosmic rules.

Anybody can learn it, as long as they are taught by expert scholars, although talent is still relevant. Therefore, not everybody who can learn Haruspicina becomes a Haruspex.

By reading the liver of the sacrificial victim (sheep in particular are well-suited for this purpose), a Haruspex studies whether an action is taken with the favor of the gods or not, and whether it will have a positive or negative outcome.

Tradition says this organ is the seat of bravery and affection, intelligence and wrath, an "earthen temple" that includes all that relates to the life of humans. It corresponds to the "celestial temple" where the gods move, each of them ruling a part of the four regions of the heavens. The same subdivision is found on the liver, so by observing the marks on this organ (scars, differences in coloration or texture, blood vessels, and so on) a skilled seer can deduce the disposition of the gods towards mortals.

Because this is a science that can only be taught, there are numerous model terracotta livers for study and research that bear the lines separating the sectors under the influence of the various gods, along with short explanations.

THE HIGH HARUSPEX OF THE LX HARUSPICES

Domitia Claudilla
Value: DV8
1 die: De Bello, De Corpore, De Natura, Hit Points
2 dice: De Societate, Ratio
3 dice: De Magia, Sensibilitas
Hit Points: 8
Weapons: None
Protections: None

ᛉ *Magic Powers:* Fate Roll

Of most noble blood, Domitia Claudilla is the first woman in the history of Rome to take the heavy mantle of High Haruspex. As the LX Haruspices gather the most illustrious experts of Haruspicina, in the last century the seat of the college was moved from Rome to Tarquinia, under the official motivation of wishing to rekindle the divining traditions of ancient Etruria. In reality, it happened because Emperor Gratianus wanted to keep it away from court intrigue. The High Haruspex is the only one to permanently live in Tarquinia, while the others convene there only every six months, on the Calendae of June and December, for customary gatherings.

Since she was a child, Domitia Claudilla has shown an affinity for the magical, often having surprisingly accurate precognitive dreams. Her parents sent her onto the path of the diviner as soon as they could, even though she was destined to a powerful marriage. As a young priestess, she avoided a grave tragedy by foreseeing the collapse of the raised stage of the praetor urbanus during crowded gladiatorial games at the Flavian Amphitheater and the resulting deaths of the august character and anybody beneath. Claudilla told her superior, the stage was checked, and it was found that one of the beams was about to split, earning the temple a large donation from the upper echelons and Claudilla the admiration of many.

Once, thanks to the careful reading of the entrails of a sheep, she foresaw a terrible storm about to strike the Tyrrhenic coasts. The Emperor, then about to set sail for Capreae, waited, but his ship sailed anyway with a cargo of ornamental peacocks for his gardens, which were claimed by the storm. The fame of Claudilla spread all over the City, and many were the nobles who came in the following years to ask for responses, usually with great results.

Ora Domitia Claudilla is more than fifty years old, and has recently taken the place of Marcus Spurinna in the august office, after more than three decades of service and his death under mysterious circumstances, two years after leaving the mantle of High Haruspex.

Claudilla is gifted with great spirit of observation, talent in judging character, and exceptional common sense. She lives in Tarquinia, in a large villa, and is the married mother of three and grandmother of five, though none of her descendants seems to have inherited her extraordinary powers.

It was she, when the Cohors Auxiliaria Arcana was founded, who trained in secret its highest-ranking members.

THE LX HARUSPICES

The Haruspices are priests skilled in reading the entrails of sacrificial victims. Their college is traditionally made up of sixty seers, a number that has not changed for centuries, although we do not know how it was chosen.

The official seat of the Haruspices is Tarquinia, where the youth with the greatest sensitivity and brightest intelligence of the Empire gather for long years of study. Now, becoming a Haruspex is not something for everyone, for there cannot be more than sixty at any time. Not all of those who live the hard life of the apprentice become Haruspices, much to the pain and anger of the excluded candidates. However, these teachings still benefit them greatly as Imperial bureaucrats or advisers to noble families.

Among the sixty acting Haruspices, roughly a third are still young trainees or have otherwise little experience, while the others are usually older and wiser. One of the exceptions is Domitia Claudilla, the acting High Haruspex, her meteoric career due to her unusually strong gift.

The Haruspices have a characteristic dress that includes a frilled shawl and a conical hat, called a tùtulus, made of leather or felt. Much like the Augurs, they, too, have a lituus, the divining staff, but instead of being wooden and a foot and a half in length, it is of bronze and the span of a hand in length, with one sharp extremity covered in a leather cap. If you will, it looks like a surgeon's knife on one side, while on the other has the classic curl of the augur's lituus, used to examine the sacrificial entrails and divide them into sectors with rightful precision.

THE *ARS FULGURATORIA*

After the Haruspicina, the most famous divining science among those invented by the Etruscans is the Ars Fulguratoria, the interpretation of lightning bolts.

In spite of his using lightning bolts as weapons, it is not just Jupiter who casts them, as many other celestial deities use lightning and thunder to communicate with the mortal realm. Jupiter simply can call on three bolts instead of just one:

- **Warning bolt**. The first to be cast, it does not cause damage, although it is known to occasionally strike rather close to mortals in order to state the intention of the god beyond mistake.
- **Terrifying bolt**. The second warning, often cast as a sign of the wrath of the god, it occasionally causes damage.
- **Devastating bolt.** This is cast as a dark punishment, and is capable of both annihilating and transforming its target.

These bolts, no matter the deity casting them, have different meanings, not all of them negative. The philosopher Seneca, in his attempt to educate young Emperor Nero, illustrated their main characteristics. First, he distinguished them between those that bring a temporary warning and those with far-reaching consequences, then he listed the following:

- Threatening bolt;
- Warning bolt;
- Protecting bolt;
- Piercing bolt;
- Crushing bolt;
- Burning bolt;
- Bolt which exhorts to perform a sacrifice;
- Bolt which helps somebody in danger.

To understand which deity cast a bolt, the Etruscans first identified through the "templum" which portion of the heavens it came from. This sacred ceremony is performed by our Augurs, too, before their divination, albeit with some differences from their Etruscan counterparts.

THE FULGURATORES

Lightning bolts appear to our eyes for the briefest of instants, and are extremely hard to interpret, requiring an expert priest to grasp all their hidden details. The Ars Fulguratoria, then, is entrusted to the Fulguratores, who study not just the direction, but also the shape, color, and effects of lightning bolts once they strike the ground.

There are not many Fulguratores left, for it seems that their duties have been taken on by the other priests. The Haruspices, for example, are capable of observing and interpreting lightning bolts in the livers of their victims.

However, it is said ancient Fulguratores could also summon lightning from the heavens, asking the gods permission to use it, avoid the consequences of being struck by a bolt, prevent its fall, or even redirect it to somebody else.

THE ETRUSCAN *TEMPLUM*

The Etruscans, the first to practice lightning bolt divination, had to codify a system to tell which parts of the heavens gave negative omens and which positive. They then determined a procedure to divide the sky into sectors, consecrating that observation space as the "templum".

The system is extensively applied in Roman religious practice, especially in bird divination, as well as to observe celestial phenomena in the night sky. It is a way to trace in the sky a square space, oriented according to the heavenly points, split into four, and then further into eight triangles, that can be favorable or adverse, depending on their position. This way, a bird or prodigy appearing in one sector or another grants insight into the disposition of the gods towards the deed about to be performed (more details on the Roman templum can be found in the *Encyclopaedia Arcana*).

The Etruscan templum, although based on the same principle, works somewhat differently from the Roman one. It does not yield a square, but a circle, and is much more strongly tied to the cosmic sphere of which we are all part. In short, it is the representation of a plane of the celestial spheres inhabited by the gods.

At the base of this difference is the observation of lightning bolts, the Ars Fulguratoria, being a sign from the gods. It is key to exactly determine the heavenly sectors and match them to their respective gods, for some are under the influence of benevolent deities and others, instead, of hostile ones.

These partitions also correspond to the ones visible on the livers of the sacrificial victims. The Ars Fulguratoria and the Haruspicina, then, are founded on the same principles, for according to the Etruscans the macrocosm and the microcosm are mirrored one in the other.

For the Etruscans, the purpose of tracing the templum was to identify the sectors of competence of the various gods and understand whether an omen (a lightning bolt in the sky or a spot in a liver) was from a friendly or enemy god.

THE LOST ART OF SUMMONING LIGHTNING BOLTS

In addition to interpreting the meaning of its apparition, the Etruscans knew how to summon lightning and wield it as a weapon. King Porsenna is said to be the one who discovered this technique, using it to destroy a terrible monster that loomed on the city of Bolsena after devastating its countryside.

In his *Naturalis Historia*, Plinius the Elder claims there are three types of lightning bolts:

- **Dry**. Bolts that do not burn, but dissolve what they strike;
- **Wet**. Bolts that do not burn, but char what they strike;
- **Clear**. Bolts that strike only the contents of a vessel, leaving the vessel itself unharmed.

The Fulguratores versed in the ancient ways could summon all of them, but alas the texts explaining how seem to have been lost, so new Fulguratores cannot.

It is said there were ritual items with similar properties, that only a trained user could use if they knew the proper rites of summoning. As the Etruscan civilization disappeared, unfortunately, they too were lost.

THE PROBLEM OF THE ETRUSCAN LANGUAGE

Aulus Gellius says in his *Noctes Atticae* that the last time Etruscan was heard was almost three hundred years before. Some say in Etruria there are still old farmers who speak a dialect derived from classic Etruscan, but of that there is no concrete evidence. Anyway, none of them would know how to write in the ancient alphabet.

Alas, when our people conquered Etruria almost six centuries ago, they made the mistake of assimilating Etruscan culture too quickly and mixing it into Roman society. Their goal was noble, turning two separate communities into one great people, but haste made them lose sight of many important details of the Etruscan culture that now are almost impossible to recover. One such detail is the alphabet, without which it is impossible to read the Etruscan documents or artifacts that occasionally emerge from oblivion.

One way to help this issue would be finding the Etruscan grammar written by Emperor Claudius more than four centuries ago during his passionate research. Unfortunately, we have no idea what happened to it, in spite of the accurate investigations of Roman libraries and the Tabularium, the State Archive on the Capitolinum, at the time of Claudius.

DE LINGUA ET LITTERIS TUSCORUM: THE LOST WORK OF EMPEROR CLAUDIUS

Emperor Claudius studied for his entire life every aspect of the lost Etruscan world with great passion. The topics he spent the most time on were language and its related alphabet. The erudite Emperor was perfectly aware that without knowing the language of a people one could never understand its secrets, and used his position of influence to acquire many rare Etruscan texts, studying and checking them against the oral testimonies from the few who still spoke that language, forming an Etruscan grammar. It is an indispensable tool for scholars and priests, and was intended to be published as *De Language and Litteris Tuscorum*, “The Language and the Alphabet of the Etruscans”. The work was still in development when the Emperor died, and during the confused days that followed his death, the manuscript, as well as many of Claudius’ other papers, was lost. The Augurs sent many trusted agents to the Imperial palace to find and secure the material, for the omens on the successor of the dead Emperor, his nephew Nero, were not encouraging, and the greater priests of Rome were attempting to secure any document with secrets or ancient lore.

Once at the palace, they found that the room where the Emperor used to study had been emptied. The major domus, once questioned, claimed the books and manuscripts had been donated to the Palatine Library, near the temple of Apollo on the Palatinus. After an Augural inspection, the Magister of the Library showed them some books, claiming they were part of the private core of Claudius’ collection. Sadly, they were such common works that the attempt at misleading was manifest. The disappearance of a treatise on the strategies for the game of Duodecim Scripta, which many knew had been compiled by Claudius himself, confirmed these suspicions. Claudius’ work on Etruscan, then, was never found.

It seems less logical for this book to be in the great Ulpian Library in Rome, near the Trajan Column, built centuries after of the death of Claudius. Neither it can be in the giant Library of Alexandria in Aegyptus, geographically and culturally too far for this study.

It seems unlikely that “official” copies of this work were ever made, because Claudius could never complete the text, being a slow scholar on his own and then the Emperor. The original manuscript of Claudius may be anywhere in an Imperial archive in Rome, as much as any working copy may be in Regio VI, forgotten in the library of some local scholar, magistrate, priest, or antiquary librarian who does not even realize its importance. This document may also have been scrapped for other purposes: cut to pieces for restoring another manuscript, or wrapping a statuette, some coins, or an old war trophy, or any number of other unusual uses.

* * *

This is what I can honestly tell you about the arcana of Italia, although I am well aware this is but a portion of the many mysteries in a land so intimately tied to the gods.

I recommend, then, that you verify on your own the information in this report, and I cannot but encourage you to send brave explorers of the unknown to put what we already know to the test and gather new elements that can increase the wealth of lore in the coffers of the Empire.

SI TU VALEAS BENE EST, EGO VALEO.

PART III

COMPENDIUM SECRETORUM ITALICORUM

This scroll will arrive to you through a trader I have entrusted with such documents in the past, for I cannot have this information delivered to you by official post, which may betray the cover I am currently under. This task was given to me by the Praefectus Praetorio himself, and nobody other than he knows my identity.

In these past months, I have walked the Province of Italia from the Alps to the channel of Scylla and Charybdis, and from there from one isle to the other, gathering anything promising about the secrets still hiding in this land. I personally gathered this information and verified as much as possible, but I cannot guarantee my sources are all trustworthy or reliable. Let me stress, though, that every rumor corresponds to some truth. If this information were even only half true, the safety of the of the Empire would still be under dire threat.

CRIME SYNDICATES

Allow me to open my report by describing criminal organizations with a past mired in illicit activities, inevitable even in the best-organized and -controlled of states. However, the associations I am about to introduce to you, although with an illegal past, have integrated into the Empire, keeping at least a facade of usefulness. They should not be immediately suppressed, then, but kept under surveillance to prevent their spread. Eliminating them would be harmful to us, too, as these groups may be instrumental in dealing with matters that require discretion.

THE LIGURI, PIRATES AND SMUGGLERS

The region today called Liguria extends from the Ligurian Sea to the great Padus River. It is no small region, and yet it does not compare to the ancient extent of the lands of the Liguri.
Although often enemies of Rome, they have occasionally proved to be quite useful in performing tasks that could not be traced back to our government. So, in order to keep a fruitful relationship with them, you need to be familiar with their characteristics.

A WARRIOR PEOPLE

The Liguri, in ancient times, occupied a great swath of land, from the Pillars of Hercules to the Etruscan lands, although they never gathered into a nation. They lived divided into tribes, which in turn were formed of clans.

They were a proud people, used to a rough life, without social classes or contemplating a dedicated caste of warriors. All the Liguri considered themselves warriors, behaving accordingly, looking very similar to one another. Men and women of all ages kept their hair long and wore wool cloaks and tunics with leather belts closed by an elaborate buckle, as well as clothes lined with furs in winter.

Ligurian society was egalitarian, greatly encouraging independence. So, women, rather than their families, were to choose their husbands, and the leadership of each tribe was entrusted to a leader elected by the community. I have never found any mention of a hereditary monarchy in their past.

THE LIGURI. A PRIMORDIAL PEOPLE

At the dawn of time, according to the ancient historians, the world was inhabited by three human peoples that lived in equal parts of the earth. The Greek poet Hesiod, writing around the time of the birth of Rome, claimed that at the dawn of the world the Scythians ruled the East, the Ethyopians lived in Africa, and the Liguri held the West.

The geographer Hekatâios Milésios provides more precise information. According to him, this people went further east than just modern Liguria, into present northern Etruria. To the west, the Liguri occupied all the lands between Albintimilium (present border of the province) to the Pillars of Hercules in the Iberian Peninsula, including many of the inner lands, ruling even on the western Alps and much of modern Gaul. To the south, they held Corsica, too.

Some believe that the Liguri once occupied the whole plain of the Padus to its mouth, and in fact the modern name of the river seems to derive from the one they used, *Bodencus* or *Bodincus*.

The Liguri had frequent trade with Etruscans, the Carthaginians, and then the Greeks, that is all those people they came into contact with from the sea, and with whom they did not mix. They never trusted outsiders, and to them remained hostile, instead taking customs from and bonding with the Celts of the Padan Plain. The geographer Strabo, however, mentioned more than once how the Liguri were the only people in the Padus not to belong to the great Celtic family.

There was, however, an "aristocracy" of sorts, a status based on martial prowess that was not inherited, but earned on the field, and could also be lost, if one did not behave accordingly to warrior honor.

These traits were at the base of the structure of the typical Ligurian village, similar to what we would call "castellum", a fortified settlement. Every community attempted to settle in an easily defensible location, building villages on the top of rocky hills and then fortifying them with additional stone walls.

These habits forged a strong, defiant people, but also fragmented its society, with tribes fighting among themselves often. As divided as they were, however, they banded together against common enemies, forcing them into great and bloody wars.

The Etruscans, who for a long time attempted to occupy the Ligurian coasts, were pushed back, and all of their settlements north of the River Macra were raided by swift Liguri warriors until the Etruscans silently accepted that river as the limit of their expansion. Around the IV Century AUC, the Liguri then founded Genua on the coast.

TRADERS BY LOCATION

Genua quickly became a rich trade emporium, the base of wealth of the Liguri, its position allowing it to regulate the exchange between the inner lands of Liguria and the great network of the Mare Nostrum trade. The Liguri started selling furs, honey, and a kind of fabric so resistant it could be used for working clothing, grain sacks, and even sails, usually dyed ultramarine blue. This last item became so popular that still today "Genua blue" is a fabric much appreciated by traders.

From the sea, the Liguri bought Greek and Etruscan pottery, wine, and perfumes and redirected them to the Padus tribes, earning much.

Liguri traders sold inland from the coasts of the Mare Nostrum the most diverse wares, especially those of the illegal kind, which the tribes from inland smuggled through hidden paths in the mountains to the Gallic people to the north, often making the return trip with other, equally "delicate" goods. Of such goods, the most popular was the Amber of the Padus (see page 181).

Soon, the tribes split into the following groups:

- **Coastal Liguri.** They settled on the coast, their main settlements being Genua and Massalia (in Gaul Narbonensis).
- **Appenninic Liguri.** They settled the mountains, extending to modern Etruria and Aemilia.
- **Pedemontani Liguri.** Their lands extended to modern Augusta Taurinorum, and also scattered about the western reaches of the Alps.
- **Inner Iberic Liguri.** The most isolated, they retreated into the mountains that separate Gaul from Iberia.
- **Corsi Liguri.** Led by a woman named Corsa, they crossed the sea and settled on the island of Corsica.

PIRATES AND SMUGGLERS BY NECESSITY

Perhaps it was to defend this trade that the Liguri began patrolling the sea on small, swift vessels, and formed bands of mountaineers in the Appennines. Similar groups formed around the Alps, too, to protect trade from Italia to Gaul, especially the illegitimate kind.

Their characteristic warrior prowess became incredibly useful in their recent piracy and smuggling operations. Though not large in stature, their lean build and relative shortness favored a fast fighting style, based on repeatedly attacking before suddenly retreating. Like small, tenacious insects, the Liguri fell on their enemies, struck, faded into the mountains, and then came back again. Never tired by prolonged engagements, they could afford to keep going on, sapping both the physical and mental fortitude of their opponents. They did not use cavalry, which was unfit for their steep lands, but were excellent explorers and foot soldiers, greatly skilled in using the spear, which allowed them to strike without closing with their enemies, and the bow, which they had learned from the Celts.

They did the same with ships. They were often underestimated as pirates because of the small size of their vessels, each owned by one family and with a small crew. These boats, however, acted in fleets of thirty or more, often clan-based, surrounding their enemies and damaging their hulls, breaking oars, and jamming rudders. Then the pirates vanished, rowing vigorously, leaving behind crippled ships that took a long time to repair, instead of sinking them.

THE LIGURI AND ROME

Divided as they always were, the Liguri reacted in a variety of ways to Rome. During the conflicts with the Carthaginians, for example, many tribes sided with them, and as many with us. After the definitive defeat of Carthago, some tribes remained hostile and resumed a hit-and-run war of their own against Roman expansion, forcing Rome to station much of its army in Liguria for a long time, moving forces from other parts of the Padan Plain. In 568 AUC, the Liguri dealt us a humiliating defeat in a battle near the Macra River, where more than 4,000 legionaries died and three legions lost their insignia. Losing three eagles from their legions is a deed matched only by Varus in the forest of Teutoburg.

Recovering them took a decisive action. The consuls Publius Cornelius Cetegus and Marcus Baebius Tamphilus were sent to resolve the matter with an army of almost forty thousand soliders, and in 573 AUC they defeated the Liguri, and, to avoid future retribution or the like, moved almost fifty thousand of them to Samnium. Now almost harmless, the Liguri did not take their new overlords well, remaining rather hostile.

In 747 AUC, the Divine Augustus made Genua capital of Regio IX, and the Liguri, more or less begrudgingly, did not have any other choice than to embrace Romanization.

This, however, never stopped Liguri pirates and smugglers, whose presence to this day is still well entrenched in the population, impossible to completely eradicate.

Some Emperors took the pragmatic approach, using these people as "facilitators" in matters that required discretion. Although there is no written account, we know for certain that some Liguri were employed to move delicate wares and, most of all, people.

Of course, they are not to be trusted, as when dealing with a Ligurian, one can never understand which of the parties involved is the one providing the service to the other, and who is actually benefiting from the trade.

THE PRINCEDOM OF THE COTTII

In the history of Rome, the Liguri are an exception for different reasons, the most unusual of them related to their long independence from the Roman conquest.

Among the various groups of Liguri that proved to be friends of Rome was a large tribe, the Taurini, who lived in the vales between the Alps behind Augusta Taurinorum, a town named after them. This people had mingled with the local Gauls, forming a Gallic-Ligurian tribe that grew to become a small princedom made up of numerous tribes. We call it the "Princedom of the Cottii", for they settled in that part of the Alps called Alps Cotiae.

This "princedom" came into contact with Roman expansion right after the Punic Wars, and relations were friendly from the beginning. The Cottii offered help in expanding towards Gaul, as guides and explorers. Julius Caesar made an agreement with King Donnus for his troops to pass through the countryside of Gaul, in exchange for allowing the Cottii to trade on the way to Gaul and in Alpine passes.

When Donnus and Caesar died, the alliance continued between the heir of the Roman general, Augustus, and the son of the king, Cotius. To consolidate their position in Roman holdings, Cotius was officially nominated Praefectus of the Roman Empire, and his kingdom became an independent protectorate. In the time of Nero, the bloodline of Donus ended, and the kingdom was absorbed into Roman territory, though it kept its identity. Rule of that small region has always belonged to a local-born Imperial magistrate ever since.

To this day, the Empire respects this peculiarity, enlisting young Cottii in our army as explorers, rapid warfare instructors, and alpine guides.

THE MAMERTINI, IMPLACABLE MERCENARIES

The Mamertini were a warrior people that lived in central Italia before the expansion of Rome and claimed to be the descendents of the god *Mamerte*, the Mars of the Osci. Their land of origin was roughly the inland of modern day Neapolis, in Campania.

However, it is much harder to trace *when* this warrior clan was born. They made their appearance on the stage of history in the V Century AUC, already fully active and organized in an army for sale to the highest bidder. Back then, they moved to Sicilia at the service of the Greek tyrants of Syracusae, where they stayed until, as suddenly as they had gotten there, they disappeared from the history books.

However, as we shall see later, one can tell their faint presence in Sicilia only by observing the region from a wider angle.

Although their numbers today have dwindled, they still operate and sell their services around Messana. Their disposition towards Rome has been ambiguous in the past, often of open treason, but at times their mercenary work has been of great use to take care of some "dirty jobs". On one hand, this means they know some less-than-pleasant secrets of the Empire; on the other, to make matters worse, we think the Mamertini are still followers of the god Soranus, the dark hunter, whose cult Rome banned many centuries ago.

Because of this, I have to include them in my report, recommending to investigate their dealings and keep them under control.

A BRIEF AND VIOLENT HISTORY

The history of the Mamertini is known only from the moment they were hired by the tyrant of Syracusae, Agatokles, in the V Century AUC. Whatever role they had when still part of the Osci before that event is still unknown, but it is likely that when Agatokles hired them, they already were an organized military force, so skilled their fame had reached Sicilia.

They were bound to Agatokles by strong ties, an affection and blind obedience not different from the bonds in the history of Rome that formed between some legions and their commanders. They recognized in the Greek tyrant a master and a guide, and gifted him their blind loyalty, for he had given them more than just money, but also home, purpose, and a warrior honor that perhaps they did not have before.

When the tyrant died, however, they wandered aimlessly, raiding and pillaging. They stormed the city of Messana, killed all the men, and took the women and goods. The city, in a strategic position, became their base of operations, from which they raided much of eastern Sicilia, both on land and at sea.
Their rule lasted more than 20 years, and would have been longer had they not made a fatal mistake; they set the gaze of their greed on the city they once defended, Syracusae. By then it had a new lord, the tyrant Ieron, a noteworthy warrior who defeated them in 473 AUC in the plain of Milae, not far from Messana, before preparing to lay siege to that city.

The Mamertini then made another fatal mistake in asking for the help of Carthago, back then one of the powers in the Mare Nostrum. The Carthaginians left a military garrison in the city and harbor of Messana, to prevent its people from attempting anything. However, although momentarily safe, it was soon clear to the Mamertini that the Carthaginians would not have just left a garrison, but soon taken over the city and its surrounding lands.

The Mamertini then asked for Rome’s help, an expanding power from up north, using the common Italic origins and both being descendants of the god Mars as leverage. If you will, this, too, was a mistake, for the landing of Roman troops on the Sicilian shores set in motion the implacable wheel of destiny, sparking the Punic Wars. Rome won them, Carthago was destroyed, and the Mamertini, as a power, were erased from history.

THE “MAMERTINE LEGION”

Being part of the Osci, the Mamertini also belonged to the great family of the Samnites, warriors by tradition, from whom they inherited the typical army structure they use to this day.
The Mamertini work in small groups of warriors, tied to their commander by oaths similar to those taken by the Germani, so each leader has a small personal army.
Units are frequently made up of 400 people, each divided into 5 groups, similar to our maniples. Some have wrongly called them a mercenary “band”, but their discipline and organization made them more similar to the Roman legion.
These “Mamertine legions” are mostly infantry, but the Mamertini are skilled riders, too, and depending on the nature of their task, they configure their units including, if necessary, cavalry. Such flexibility is applied to their deployment in battle, modified to fit any kind of terrain. Their favorite weapons are the spear, similar to our pilum, and the short sword, but they are capable archers as well, completing their equipment with a small round shield. In a melee, they use a small axe, too, which it seems they have developed on their own (see page 176).

MAMERTINE WINE

The name of the Mamertini has today disappeared from the list of the Italic peoples, but was not lost. There is still a wine from northeastern Sicilia bearing it. Originally from Campania, the Mamertini brought its grapes to Sicilia when they were hired by the tyrant of Syracusae. Then, when they conquered Messana, they planted them all over the region and took over local production.
Perhaps it would have remained a local variety if Julius Caesar had not had it served in abundance at the celebration for his third election as consul. The Divine Caesar appreciated the *Mamertinus* more than any other wine, and even had it shipped to Rome. Greatly appreciated by the nobility, the geographer Strabo thought it was one of the best wines of the Empire.

Each “legion” acts independently, depending on the task the leader is hired for, so bands of Mamertini can be found involved in many and different operations at the same time, without a common goal. The only banner they ever gathered under as a whole was that of the tyrant of Syracusae.

FOLLOWERS OF DARK SORANOS

During their stay in Sicilia, the Mamertini began worshiping the god Soranus, the dark hunter. Today, his cult is banned, but in ancient times it had many followers in Sicilia.
Soranus is a warrior and a stern god, although not entirely hostile to human kind (see page 76). His passion for war is great, and he demands utter dedication from his followers, characteristics that were met with great enthusiasm by the Mamertini, who looked for a guide, somebody to belong to, and to whom to swear eternal service. So, as if Soranus was their divine commander, the Mamertini swore to serve him to the death, and it was upon him that these mercenaries swore, and today swear, eternal loyalty to their commander.
It was for this devotion that they were willing to give everything, facing death, and often sacrificing themselves in the blood rite of *devotio*, consecrating their lives to the gods of the Underworld in exchange for a boon (more information on the *devotio* can be found in the *Encyclopaedia Arcana*).
This is perhaps one of the key reasons behind the incredible martial prowess of the Mamertini in an open fight. Should a battle ever turn against them, their leader does not hesitate to offer his own life in a solitary and surely fatal charge.

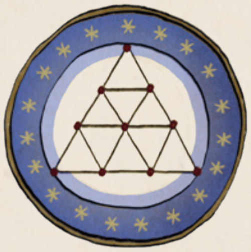
His men let him fight the enemy alone and watch him die, beating their swords on their shields, his blood an offer to Soranus. The god, in exchange, not only spares the unit from ruin, but sometimes even makes them win.

Soranus is honored with blood, even in case of an easy victory, his people offering him all the prisoners after the fight. As a result, this combination of martial prowess and religious practice has made it so the Mamertini have suffered an unusually low number of defeats.

MAGICAL AND MYSTERIOUS CIRCLES

I shall describe, now, some groups steeped in the magical or philosophical, that somehow also pursue a political goal. Although the supernatural is better watched by priests and Augurs, my observation is still aimed at finding any danger they could pose to the stability of the government and the safety of the Imperial system, even when dealing with the supernatural world.

THE CIRCLE OF THE PYTHAGOREANS



The Circle of the Pythagoreans, officially, is a known and entirely legal group of scholars that claims illustrious origins. It was founded by the famous mathematician and philosopher Pythagoras in the IV Century AUC, and provides advanced education to students and disciples from all over the Empire and beyond. However, not only does it carry forward studies on various aspects of science and philosophy, but it also administers the city of Kroton, to which the Empire has granted a special status.

The contents of this brief are known to all, as the surface of a mirror that the Pythagoreans show to whoever looks at them. Truth, however, is harder to come by.

It was my specific task to break through this facade, leading me to learn new and highly-restricted information never before disclosed to Imperial authorities.

Everything seems to hint that the Pythagoreans are a mystic and religious sect of as-yet-unclear goals, accessible only to its initiates. The selection process, officially, is based on the intellect of the aspirants, so only the brightest minds are admitted to study the sophisticated disciplines the Pythagoreans teach. However, the real selection happens behind closed doors, and the aspirants have referred to strange tests that have nothing to do with science and, instead, are related to the supernatural.

THE CITY OF KROTON

Kroton is a pleasant town, not very large, but arrayed in an orderly octagonal grid. It rises at the feet of a promontory that stretches to the sea, an ideal position for the control of both water and land. Around the promontory are five isles, Meloessa, Tyris, Eranusa, Ogygia, and Dioscoron, which make the city of Kroton easily recognizable even far away from the coast. Ogygia is so beautiful that legends claim it was the domain of the nymph Calypso, whom Ulysses loved so much he spent eight years there.

The climate is healthy, so its people are strong and beautiful, men and women of exceptionally pleasant appearance, robust and apt for physical labor. The famed physician Demokedes, first in applying medical science to the training of athletes, was born here, and perhaps it is not a coincidence that in Kroton was born, too, the most famous of the Olympic athletes, the pugilist Milon, winner in wrestling and fighting for seven times, one right after the other. Close to the Pythagorean school, it seems he had married one of the daughters of Pythagoras.

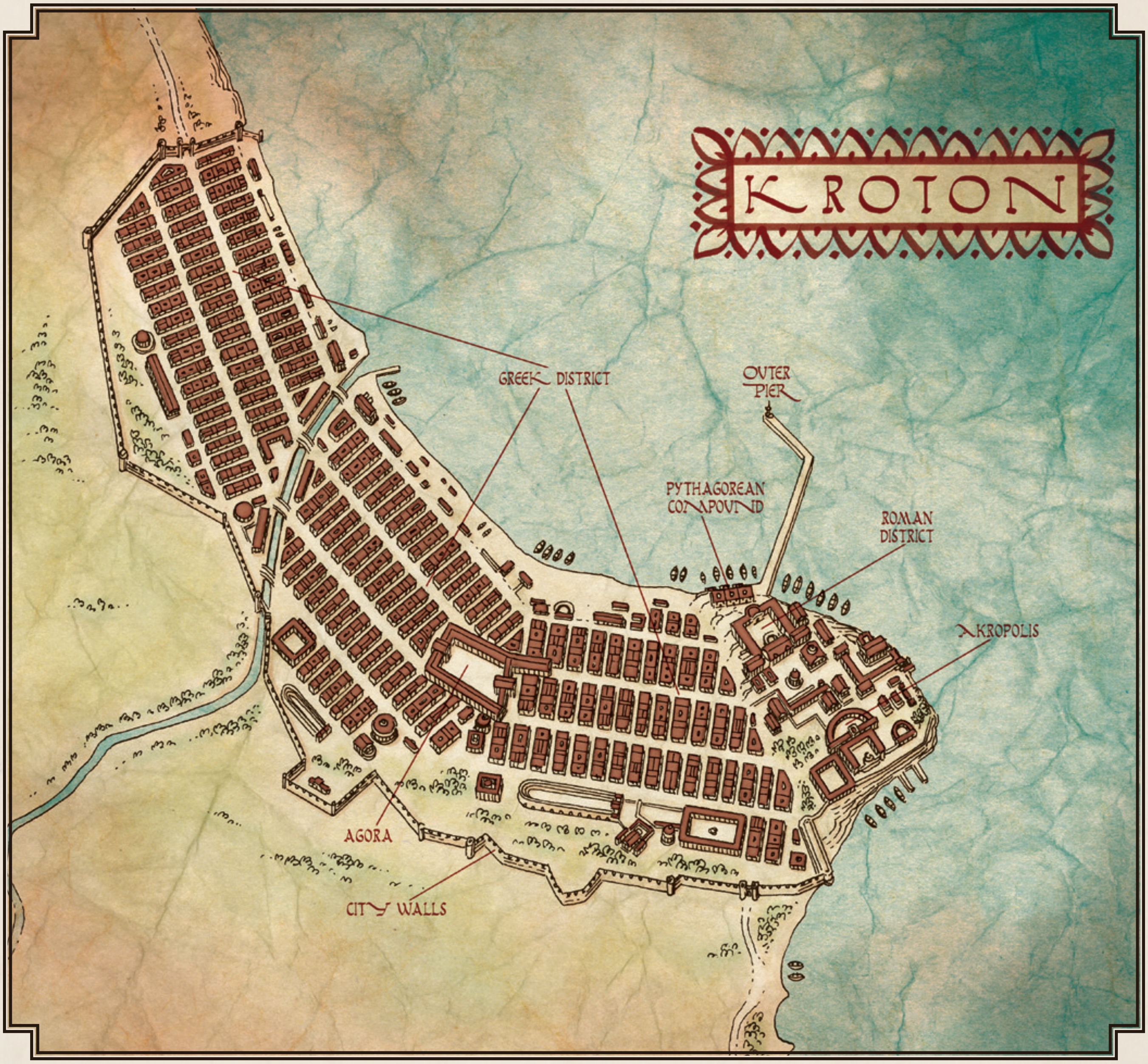
Before Rome, Kroton ruled the Mare Ionicum and its inner lands. In 243 AUC, defeating the wealthy neighboring Sibari, the power of Kroton expanded to the whole Ionic coast, although it also began declining, weakened by infighting for power.

In 473 AUC, Rome conquered Kroton, but there never was a relationship of trust, nor could there be one after the latter, during the Punic Wars, sided with Carthago. In 559, a permanent military garrison proved to be necessary in the city, although today it is well-administered by the Pythagoreans, its harbor bustling and second in the Mare Ionicum only to Tarentus', in Regio II (Apulia, Calabria, and Hirpini).

Rome stationed its troops on the ancient Acropolis of the city, and today the area is the newest district of the city, as it was heavily reworked and modified to make it fit for our permanence.

The Greek neighborhoods are the most ancient, the oldest of them right at the foot of the hill of the Acropolis. They are made of small homes, distributed in regular blocks, formed by the grid of larger streets called *platèiai* and smaller ones, the *stenopòi*.

The Circle of the Pythagoreans has discretely infiltrated those who live at the foot of the hill of the Acropolis, a complex built on terraces dug into the side of the small mount and embellished with pleasant gardens.



The entire complex has been modified multiple times, so the buildings are irregular and sometimes overlapping, although the whole composition looks somehow tidy. The lowest part has direct access to the sea through a private pier, and some shelter for boats. Some say the Pythagoreans dug secret passages into the side of the hill to leave the complex and appear unseen elsewhere, however this information has never been verified.

THE CIRCLE, AN UNUSUAL NATURE

The Circle has always been under careful Imperial surveillance, although the lack of evidence of any illegal activity on their part suggests there is no reason to shut it down. On the contrary, they have often proved useful, especially in solving medicinal and even applied mechanics issues. Some valid advisers to the Empire are affiliated with the Pythagoreans and lend their services to the army, the Imperial court, and both civilian and military engineers. Officially, then, the Pythagoreans are friends and allies of the Empire.

However, secrecy about the admission to the Circle aside, there is another element that makes them, if not suspicious, at least unusual. They do not follow a religious creed, having little interest in deities of any cult or pantheon. It seems that their most passionate faith lies in mathematics.

Unusual elements about the Pythagoreans abound. They follow a list of eating and behavioral habits that make it quite demanding to live like them, and often seem absurd, although they seem to have a rational explanation for all of them. The following rules are known to all, but there surely are other, jealously guarded, secrets:

- **Do not eat meat.** All the Pythagoreans are vegetarians, for they believe in the *metempsychosis*, the migration of souls. According to them, when somebody dies, their soul migrates into another creature, possibly even an animal, so they do not wish to commit the sacrilege of eating something that, in another life, may have been a human being.
- **Do not touch fava beans.** This is perhaps the most unusual, but also the most stringent, rule of the Circle. Not only can they not eat *favae*, fava beans, but neither can they touch them. It is said that Pythagoras himself died because he refused to cross a fava bean field as he was fleeing from his enemies, although the most common explanation is that these beans are related to the cult of the dead, and so have a negative influence on the living.
- **Do not break bread or bite it directly.** According to them, bread must be always and only cut with a knife, perhaps to have always equal slices.
- **Do not tear wreaths and festoons.** This rule seems to be inspired by their great respect for the plants and flowers often used in making votive wreaths.
- **Do not walk on main roads.** This rule may be born of the persecution that Pythagoras was the victim of during his time in Samos, his home city, and could hide a measure of personal safety.

ARITHMOGEOMETRY

According to the Pythagoreans, the divine essence of the universe can be accessed only through numbers. Human beings can access this divine essence through the study of numbers, arithmetic, and their spatial representation, geometry. For this reason, the discipline on which the scientific and philosophical teachings of the Pythagoreans are based is called "arithmogeometry".

To understand this concept better, one must remember that the Pythagoreans do not represent numbers with symbols, but as geometric dispositions of elements. In his lessons, Pythagoras used pebbles, the *psèphoi*, placed on a surface to form numbers, and that system is still in use today. This is why, for example, the number nine is defined as a "square number"; three rows of three pebbles form a square with three pebbles per side and nine inside.

Some numbers also have special importance in the doctrines of the Pythagoreans, with the first four being the holiest:

- **One, or Monad.** The *Archè*, the beginning of all things, it represents the unity of the cosmos, neither masculine nor feminine, neither active nor passive. It is geometrically represented by a dot.
- **Two, or Diad.** Because it is the initial unity multiplied, this number represents cosmic multiplicity. It is the first even number, and represents the feminine principle, as well as opposites and, therefore, dialogue. Its geometric representation is the line, marked by two dots.
- **Three.** Born of the union of One and Two, its essence is masculine. Geometrically, it represents the plane, for with three points one marks a surface.
- **Four.** It represents balance, the solid foundation, for it is on four pillars that the roof of a building stands, not less. It is, then, the symbol of justice and solid geometry, because four dots form the simplest of geometrical figures, the tetrahedron.

From the combination of these four numbers come all the others. The following have greater significance amongst them:

- **Five.** Being the sum of the first odd and the first even number, it represents wedding. It is the number of life and power, and is represented by a star built on the sides of a pentagon.
- **Nine.** The "square number", formed by the multiplication of Three by itself, which makes a perfect square, with three dots on each side.
- **Ten.** Summing the first four numbers, the result is ten, the number of cosmic perfection and completeness. It is represented with the sacred symbol of the Pythagoreans, the *Tetraktys*.

THE "CIRCLE OF NECESSITY"

Pythagoreans believe neither in the gods, like all the other people of the Empire, nor in the afterlife. They, instead, believe that upon death the soul is freed from the body and moves into another living being, potentially even an animal. According to them, humanity was hurled onto the earth due to an ancient sin that condemned human souls to a cycle of cleansing, to be freed of this burden and return to cosmic order. This cycle puts souls through numerous lives, moving from one body to another, to be cleansed in a process the Pythagoreans call "metempsychosis" or "the cycle of necessity". If their previous life was good and virtuous, then they are reborn into something superior, otherwise they are receded to an inferior life form. The closer the soul to cleansing, the closer it is to the end of this cycle, with the human stage closest to purification, being the one of the philosopher mathematician.

This is also why they are strictly vegetarian, for they do not want to risk the chance of eating somebody they may have met in a previous life of their soul. An anecdote tells that one day Pythagoras saw a man beating a dog on the street. *The philosopher stopped the man immediately, saying, "Stop beating the poor creature. I feel his soul is that of a dear friend of mine. I can tell by the timber of his voice."*

THE SACRED *TETRAKTYS*

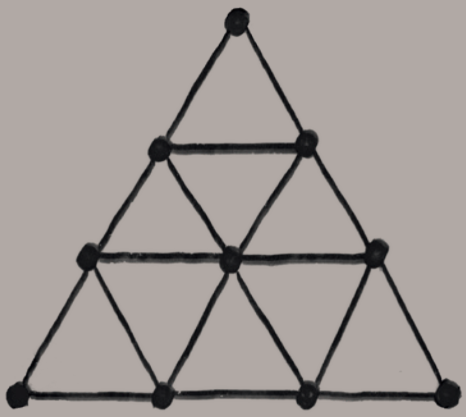
The Tetraktys is a symbol so sacred that the Pythagoreans swear on it. In its basest form, it is a triangle with four dots per side. However, observing this figure one soon realizes that its simplicity sums the basis of the arithmogeometric thought.

There are ten dots in this symbol, ten units, the result of the sum of the first four numbers (1+2+3+4), the number of the Universe according to Pythagorean lore.

In addition, this form includes an equal amount of feminine, even numbers (2+4+6+8) and masculine, odd ones (1+3+7+9), with neither principle prevailing over the other.

Each tier of the figure represents a geometric, philosophical principle and a natural element:

- **First tier.** The dot, the Origin, the fundamental unity, Fire.
- **Second tier.** Two dots. The complementing opposites, duality, line, Air.
- **Third tier.** Three dots. The measure of space and time, the sum of Monad and Diad, the surface of the plane, Water.
- **Fourth tier.** Four dots. Matter, the foundation of the world, solids, Earth.



PYTHAGORAS OF SAMO: SCIENTIST, PHILOSOPHER, MYSTIC

Pythagoras was born in Samo, in Achaia, roughly two centuries after the foundation of Rome. He soon left his home city over a disagreement with the despotic rule of Polycrates, the local tyrant. He traveled much, visiting Aegyptus and, according to the tales, even Babylonia. Eventually, he settled in Kroton around 223 AUC.

Here, he founded his philosophical school, open to women, too, and married Theano, one of his students. Soon, the school became not just a place for intellectuals to gather, but also a powerful political group, his followers and sympathizers taking over all the key sectors of the local government and administration and leading the city to prosperity.

After a few years, however, the political landscape changed, with the emergence of a strong "people" party headed by one Cylon, who opposed the aristocratic and intellectual governance of Pythagoras and his followers. This led to strong tensions and, eventually, the torching of Pythagoras' home, although the great scholar was saved by his students and fled to Locri, then to Tarentum, and eventually settled in Metaponto. There he died, chased by Cylon's assassins, preferring to offer his life rather than touch fava beans, that being one of his most sacred rules. He was actually fleeing from assassins when he reached a field of fava beans that he could not avoid crossing, so he then stopped on its edge and was reached by his enemies, who killed him.

During his life, Pythagoras did not write books, but his lessons were gathered and put in text form by his students. His multifaceted intellect is remembered mostly as a philosopher, with some historians crediting him with the invention of the very word "philosophy", although he was a mystic, too. He theorized an entirely original cosmological system, without the despotic rule of the gods and borne by the natural harmony of numbers. Because of his beliefs, he studied natural phenomena for a long time to achieve a deeper understanding of the divine essence of the cosmos. As a scientist, his name will be forever tied to the theorem that so wonderfully reveals the relationship between numbers and geometric figures, mirror of the perfection of the universe.

ORGANIZATION OF THE SECT

The sect is divided into four areas, each with its own specialization in a field of study. The Pythagoreans study all the forms of scientific thought anyway, but as they proceed, they specialize in a specific area:

- **Mathematicians**. The smallest group and the adepts of higher rank, in origin, they were those admitted to the lessons of Pythagoras, with whom they could directly speak and learn from. Today, they are scholars, well-versed in all the scientific disciplines, not only mathematics. They lead an ascetic life, with no personal property, and are vegetarian. They rarely leave the seat of the sect, and if they do it is only for dire necessities. They are the heads of the sect.
- **Acusmatics**. The literal translation of this name is "those who listen". At first, they were lower-ranked disciples, admitted to the lessons, but not allowed to see Pythagoras. They could only listen, separated by a curtain, and were forced to always remain silent. Today, for the lack of better word, they are the "operative arm" of the sect.
- **Iatromancers**. The literal interpretation of this word is "seer healer". They are a peculiar kind of seer, because instead of being possessed by a god to give their responses, like Sibyllas, they are capable of personally finding knowledge. They can separate their soul from their body, leaving it in a state of deep slumber as they wander between the worlds of humans and gods. In other cultures, they would be called shamans, but, as their name says, they are also capable of treating many different diseases, from those of the body to those of the soul. They are often itinerant healers, greatly loved by the people they help.
- **Mechanics**. They are scholars specialized in the practical applications of the theories elaborated by the sect. The best known of them was the Tarantine Archytas, who in the III Century AUC invented a system to fly a small automaton, a dove, using compressed air (see below). Today, the Mechanics of Kroton develop all manner of projects and gladly take specific requests or suggestions from the Empire.

Each of these four fields of expertise is under the direction of a Master, equal among themselves, who form a council of sorts, the *Tèsseres Sophòi* or *Quattuor Savii*, the Four Sages, who structure and direct the life of the community.

Officially, the Four have jurisdiction only over the scholars, and do not deal with politics or other disciplines that influence the outside, and are not involved with governing the city of Kroton. However, reliable sources have proved to us that the Four are well involved with numerous projects all over the Empire, and have emissaries everywhere. The Pythagoreans keep a polite silence about these activities and, if exposed, only say that they are conducting studies and research of purely scientific nature.

THE *TÈSSERES SOPHÒI*, THE FOUR SAGES OF THE PYTHAGOREANS

Not one person, but a council of four, the sacred number the Pythagoreans associate with Justice, leads the sect. In Greek, they are called *Tèsseres Sophòi* and in Latin *Savii Quattuor*, the Four Sages. Each is the leader of one of the groups into which the sect is split, and, though nominally of the same authority, the Mathematician is considered slightly above the other three, for they believe mathematics to be the purest form of human intellect. Should the Four find themselves in a draw when making a decision, then, it is the leader of the Mathematicians who breaks the tie.

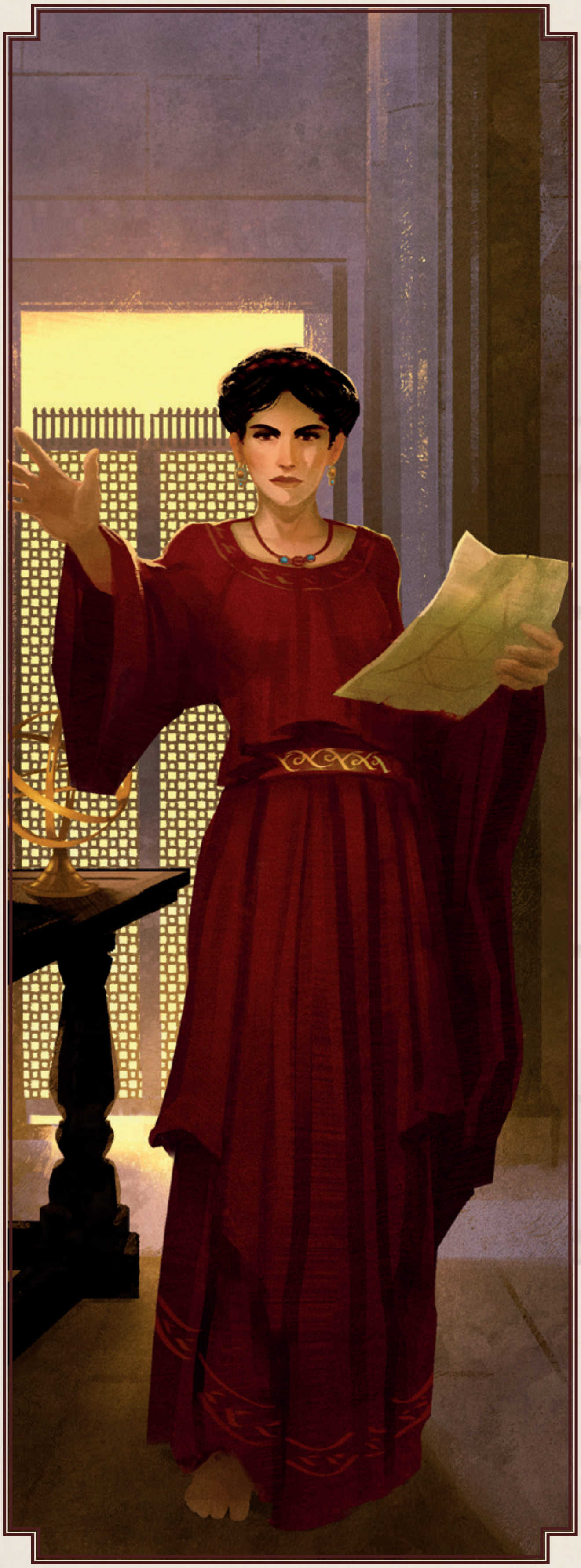
BRAVE EXPERIMENTS

The Pythagoreans are scholars that deal not only in the theoretical, but also have a great passion for the practical and the application of their expansive mathematical and physics lore to building machines beyond the imagination of the common man. Given their highly experimental nature, these machines are often on the edge between useful and harmful, and, for now, are kept hidden and developed in a secret facility, under strict Imperial observation.

THE PYTHAGOREANS AND THE COHORS ARCANA

Since its foundation, the Magistri Arcani of the Cohors had preliminary contacts with the Four Pythagorean Sages through the Praetorians, who were already supplied by the Pythagoreans. The Magistri remains greatly impressed by the originality of some pieces of equipment, and a possible official collaboration between the Cohors Arcana and the Pythagoreans, to equip the Custodes with cutting-edge gear for their special missions, seems to be in the air.

As of yet, there is no concrete evidence of such a collaboration. I, myself, was informed in a purely unofficial way by members of the Praetorian Guard stationed in Kroton, so its authenticity should be verified by the higher echelons back in Rome.



MYIA, ASTRONOMER, *ARCHIMATEMATIKÈ* (FIRST MATHEMATICIAN)

Value: DV10
1 die: De Bello, De Corpore, De Magia, Hit Points, Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Scientia, De Societate, Ratio
3 dice: De Scientia (Astronomy, Philosophy, Mathematics)
Hit Points: 10
Weapons: None
Protections: None

Of an ancient line of Pythagorean philosophers, Myia was born into the sect to mathematician parents. Although the Pythagoreans claim that all people are born equal, her family is considered a local nobility of sorts, and traces its origins back to none other than Pythagoras himself. It seems Myia was one of the daughters of Pythagoras, too.

Myia is thin and pale, with piercing, dark eyes. Her hair is so black it shimmers blue, and her students have praised it with verses written by Alcaeus for the divine Sappho, calling her "crowned in violets". From only her looks, it is hard to judge her age, but she is supposed to be forty years old. She is not the social type, does not speak much, and mostly stays back to observe. Her favorite field of study is the cosmos, and some have said she is similar to the stars she studies: luminous, cold, and distant. Her analytic intelligence allows her not only to excel in the sciences and philosophy, but also to apply the art of deduction to everyday life, and it seems she has collaborated with the rulers of Kroton to resolve a few mysterious matters. Myia is said to be at the head of a network of Pythagorean agents scattered about the world, who keep her informed of what happens and, if the rumors are to be believed, at times have influenced events by more than just observing.

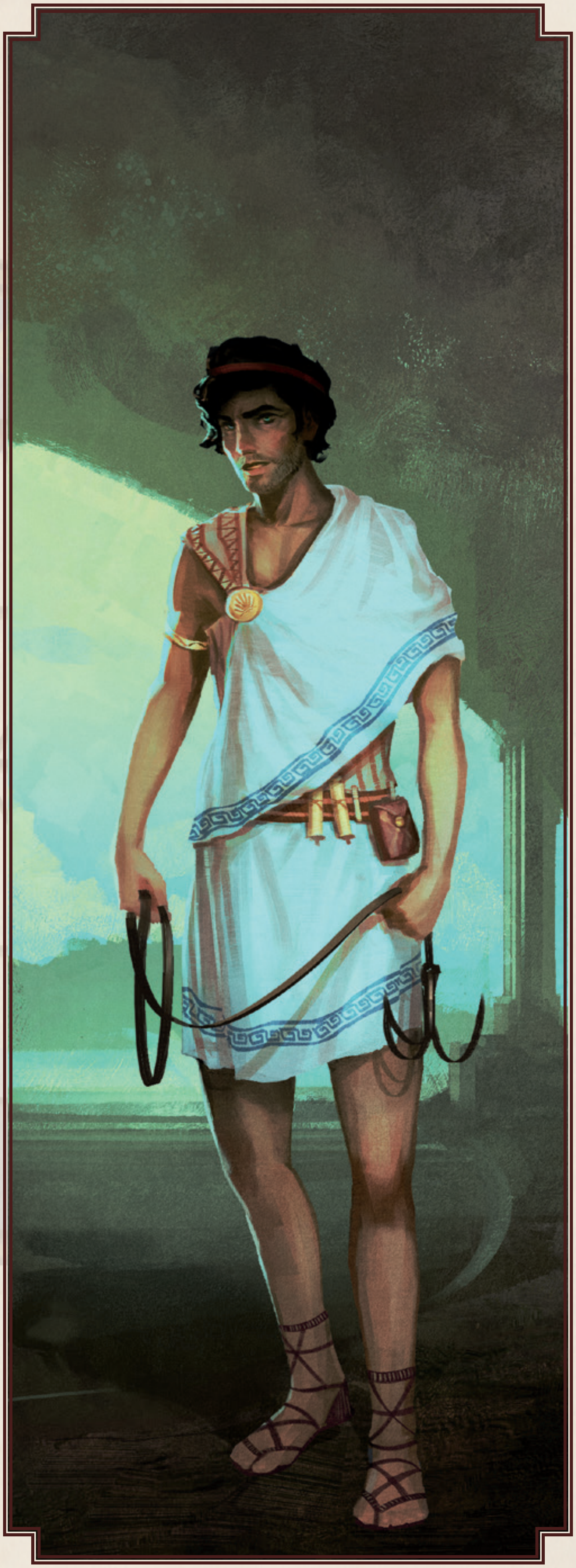
Some say this is just misinformed hearsay, perhaps spread by her enemies, although documents found in far-away lands, signed with the Tetraktys and the letter "M", could point to an actual involvement of the First Mathematician.

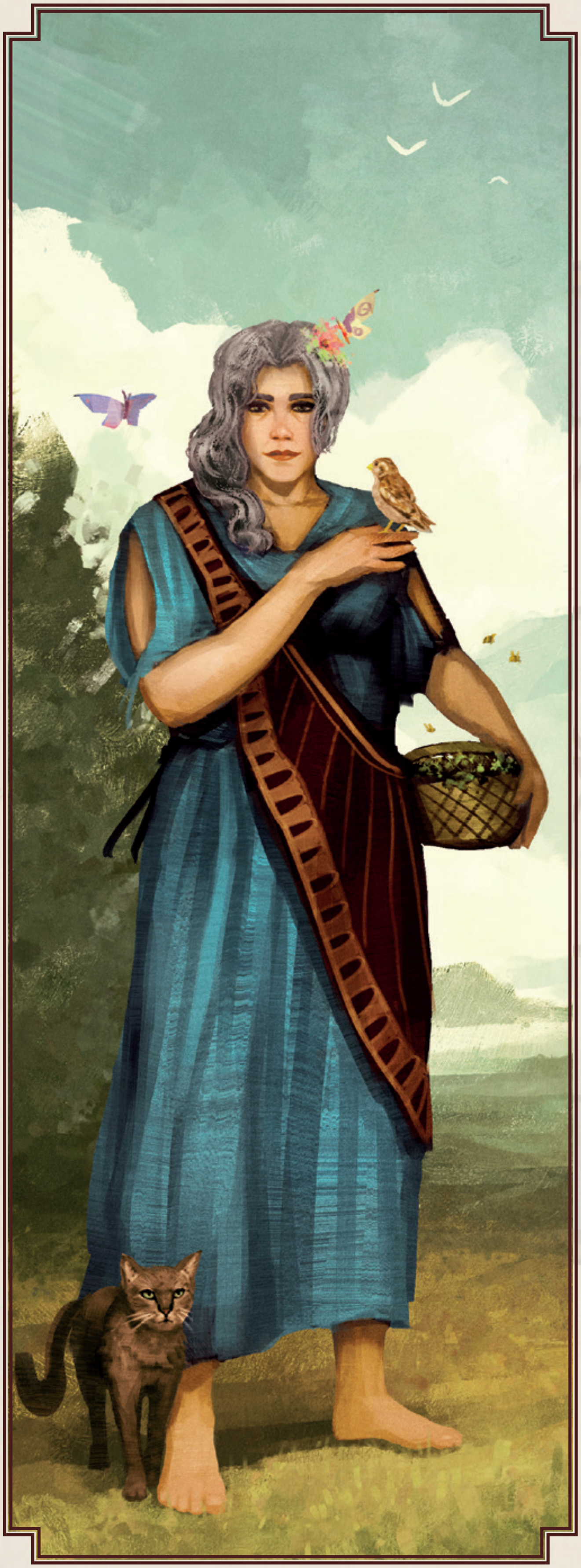
JASON, SCIENTIST, *ARCHIACUSMATIKÒS* (FIRST ACUSMATIC)

Value: DV8
1 die: De Magia, Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Bello, De Corpore, De Natura, De Scientia, Hit Points, Ratio
3 dice: De Societate
Hit Points: 16
Weapons: None
Protections: None

A sharp mind, Jason is a young man of thirty, probably born on an island of Achaia. Not much is known about him, and only a few can claim to have seen his face, as he prefers to travel in disguise, or, as he says, respectfully dressed so as not to offend the customs of the peoples of the many corners of the world he has traveled. It is true that he is comfortable anywhere, as his brilliant mind allows him to quickly learn any language, and his great charisma has granted him open doors in many communities. He knows how to ride, swim, sail, and steer a racing chariot, as well as wield almost any weapon, for he applies the laws of the physics, of which he has an intimate knowledge, to any utensil.

Jason rarely spends much time in Kroton, as business of an unspecified nature always leads him far away. The Pythagoreans claim he travels so much to gather every kernel of scientific lore of every people, even those that many consider primitive, although nobody has ever confirmed having seen him in any of the places he swears to have visited, claiming instead they had sighted him somewhere else entirely. He is said to enjoy great success with the ladies thanks to his sharp wit, athletic physique, and the only known detail of his physicality, his blue eyes. He seems to have inherited them from his mother, a true Macedonian beauty, supposedly the lover of a Persian satrap close to the Imperial family. Jason, then, should be of noble blood from his father's side, but perhaps it is just one of the many stories he has spread about himself to enrich the charm and mystery of his person.





THEANO, PHYSICIAN, *ARCHIATROMANTIKÈ* (FIRST IATROMANCER)

Value: DV8
1 die: De Bello, De Corpore
2 dice: De Magia, De Natura, De Scientia, Hit Points, Ratio, Sensibilitas
3 dice: De Natura (Herbalism), De Scientia (Medicine)
Hit Points: 16
Weapons: None
Protections: None

Born in Crete, where the finest medicinal herbs are prepared, and seat of a most skilled group of herbalists, she moved to Kroton early to study with the Pythagoreans. Theano is roughly fifty years old, of robust build, and has a jovial and easy-going look to her. She is extremely empathic towards all living beings, no matter if they are humans, animals, or even plants, and her gardens are a triumph of flowers. She is always followed by a small pack of playful critters, such as hens, dogs, birds, cats, and even bees. Even wild beasts spontaneously eat from her hands. Theano is known for pushing further the already strongly vegetarian Pythagorean lifestyle, not eating anything that has animal origin, not even eggs, and only accepting the honey her bees offer her on their own.

She claims to see the spiritual essence of all living creatures, and could never snuff them out, not even for her own nourishment. This skill in telling spirit from matter allows her to separate her soul from her own body and project it far away, a widespread practice among the Pythagoreans, which she has brought to a whole new level. In fact, few can cover the distances, whether temporal or geographical, Theano is capable of exploring.

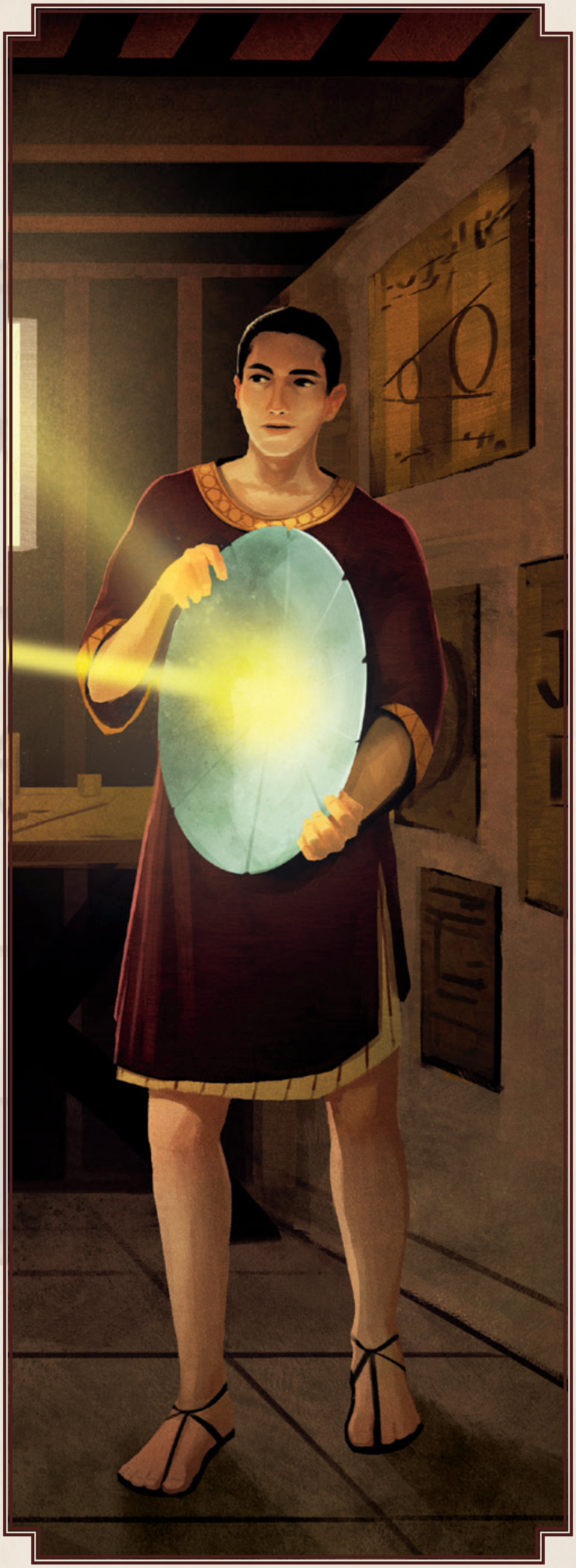
She is an expert physician, strong in both her personal inclination and the great wisdom she has learned in the Pythagorean school, and there are no natural diseases she does not know a remedy for. Should a patient ever be beyond her advanced capabilities, she eases their pain greatly to lead them to a serene departure.

ERON, PHYSICIST, *ARCHIMECHANIKÒS* (FIRST MECHANIC)

Value: DV8
1 die: De Bello, De Corpore, Hit Points, Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Scientia, De Societate, Ratio
3 dice: De Scientia (Machinae)
Hit Points: 8
Weapons: None
Protections: None

Eron is a young physicist, a native of Syracusae. The youngest of the Four, still in his twenties, his prodigious gifts granted him admission to the Pythagoreans when he was but 13. He exercised his great intelligence at first in devising new scams for gamblers, tampering with weight scales for dishonest traders, and even laundering large sums of money. In Kroton looking for more people to defraud, he was exposed by Myia on behalf of the town government and arrested. The woman, however, was impressed by such an unusual boy, and offered him a chance at redemption and proper training, turning Eron into the most loyal servant of the Pythagorean cause, and earning her almost a cultist.

Eron is well known to the Praetorians, too, for whom he has sometimes made wonderful and modern machines or pieces of equipment. He appreciates intellectual and practical challenges, so no matter the request, whether it is an extravagant modification or something entirely new, he always answers with an optimistic, "*Quodlibet*!", "Anything you wish", earning him the monicker of "Q".



THE AETNEAN BROTHERHOOD

The following is something you may find difficult to believe. I was unsure whether or not to include it in this report, and have spent much time personally investigating these rumors, but I included it anyway.

A coven of Giants may hide under the name of "Aetnean Brotherhood", enemies of humankind, a secret organization that may already have infiltrated numerous Imperial provinces. This group is named after both their common origin as spawn of the same primordial era and Mount Aetna, for centuries considered the lair of the Cyclopes, where they are rumored to gather. Their aim is supposedly to reunite the great Giant clans, including their Celtic brethren, the Hyperboreans, the Arimaspi of far-away Scythia, and who knows how many others, under one banner.

Since I could not travel to so many different lands and find evidence of other giants to verify these rumors on the Aetnean Brotherhood, the following is only about their Italic movements. This, then, is but a fragment of this disconcerting conspiracy, and I recommend investigating elsewhere, too, as soon as possible.

A CLAN OF DIVINE MONSTERS

Scholars believe the Giants of the Mare Nostrum are divided into numerous clans, related to each other:

- **Sicilian Cyclopes.** Children of the Sea God Neptune and the nymph Toosa, they had settled the entire island of Sicilia, especially the areas around Aetna. Today, they are said to live beneath it and, under the guidance of the god Vulcan, work for the gods as skilled smiths, having crafted items like Jupiter's lightning bolts, the caduceus of Mercury, and the weapons of Minerva and Mars. Their number is unknown, but the most famous among them is Polyphemus, the first of seven brothers.
- **Builder Cyclopes.** Numerous and unknown, probably related to the Sicilian clan, they made all the ancient monuments based on enormous rock structures, such as the walls of Corinthos in Achaia.
- **Ekatonchìri.** Children of the primordial Sky God Ouranos and Gea, their hundred arms make them even more monstrous, if possible, than the other giants. Luckily there seem to be only three of them, Kottos, Briareos, and Gyes, sealed in Tartarus under the watch of Kampe, one of the monstrous Dracaenae, creatures half dragon and half woman (see page 202). They should still be there after Jupiter punished them by banishing them for eternity after a failed rebellion.
- **Giants of Ouranos.** Brethren of the Ekatonchiri, though children of Ouranos and Gea, while other traditions say of Gea and Tartarus, they have only two arms. Their actual number is unknown, but sources mention only two dozen of them, including Alcyoneus, the firstborn, said to be caged below Vesuvius, Brontes, he who causes thunder, Steropes, he who forges lightning, Arges, he who causes thunderclaps in the sky, Enceladus, who has two enormous serpents in place of his legs, Pallas, he whose skin is impenetrable, and Porphyrion, the strongest of them. They were banished to the deepest pit of Hades by Ouranos himself to prevent them from taking his power, and are now under the watch of the Dracaena Kampe. They were then freed by Jupiter, who took the celestial throne with their help, but then caged again.
- **Laestrygonians.** Closely related to the Cyclopes, as they, too, are born of Neptune, they are said to be the children of Laestrygon, son of of the God of the Sea. Unlike the Cyclopes, however, they have both eyes and less bestial customs (see page 61), and are said to hide on the isle of Corsica.

In addition to them, there could be more giant clans spread all over the world, of whom I could not gather more information than the following:

- **Arimaspians.** Rumored to live in Scythia, it is not clear whether they are evil, or larger than humans, so they may not belong to this brotherhood.
- **Celtic Giants.** The legends of Britannia and Hiberia paint them as gentle and often benevolent to humans. If this is true, they may not be part of the Aetnean Brotherhood, either.
- **Gegenees.** Said to have six arms and be locked in Tartarus, given the fury and evil the legends attribute to them, they seem like a perfect fit for the Brotherhood.
- **Giants of Hyperborea.** Of them, we know so little that they could very well be baseless legends. It is difficult to say whether such faraway clans would ever want to ally with the ones closer to the Mare Nostrum.

THE SUBTERRANEAN TUNNELS

According to the reports of ancient authors, the Cyclopes have built a network of subterranean tunnels coiling out from the depths of Mount Aetna, the fulcrum of their workshops, where they are said to forge upon the flames erupting from Hades itself.

When they still roamed free and worked with the gods, they dug their workshops as close as they could to veins of ore, had the entirety of Sicilia for themselves, and loved its bountiful pastures for their herds.

The time came, however, when Jupiter chose to leave Sicilia to humankind, as it was too beautiful and fertile a land not to leave it to people who could farm it and make it prosper, demanding that its previous inhabitants leave. Of course, they did not obey, and so were caged in the bowels of the volcano. Some of them, Polyphemus among them, perhaps because they were shepherds and not smiths, were confined to a few islands unknown to humans, where they could raise their herds, so the Laestrygonians were exiled to the island of Sardinia, but were forced to leave it soon thereafter.

Jupiter's plan proved to be shortsighted, however, for he perhaps did not know that the Cyclopes could not actually be caged under Mount Aetna. The enormous smiths had already dug an impressive network of tunnels, granting them great ease of movement, and, sheltered from divine surveillance, could expand those tunnels and connect together the other locations the rest of their brethren had been exiled to. Soon, all the islands of the Mare Nostrum were joined into one, enormous network, and the digging has not stopped ever since. If these rumors are to be believed, by now the Giants may have reached any corner of the Empire.

Angered by this (according to them) illegitimate confinement, they have banded into an alliance of Giants with the same original goal of the Titans: overthrowing the rule of Jupiter and establishing their own.

THE CORPORATION OF THE FREE SMITHS

One could ask, at this point, how can the Aetnean Brotherhood directly harm the Empire. The celestial gods have already faced the Giants, and defeated them in a battle so legendary its echoes are still felt to this very day. If they ever attack the heavens again, Jupiter shall deal with them.

The issue, however, is that these Giants could have human allies, after much more earthly goals that could drag the Empire into the fray. The Aetnean Brotherhood, in truth, to operate efficiently must expand the scope of its operations, as it requires materiel and resources not readily available underground.

This is where their human allies, the "Free Smiths", as they call themselves, become relevant. Smiths only in name, they are a group of intellectuals, researchers, and philosophers who hope to learn from the Cyclopes the most refined and secret techniques of metallurgy. For them, the skill of the

THE GIGANTOMACHÌA: THE WAR BETWEEN GODS AND GIANTS

At first, the cosmos had no deities. There were only Ouranos, the sky, and Gea, the earth. Together, they generated twelve gods, six males and six females, called Titans. The two primordial beings then gave birth to the Giants and the Ekatonchiri, and Ouranos chose to banish these monstrous spawn of his, fearing they could rebel and take his throne. However, the Giants were not the real threat, as Ouranos found out, as it would be Cronos, one of the Titans, who dethroned him. Cronos and his brethren took over the heavens, leaving the Giants chained in Tartarus, and, given the cyclic nature of violence, the usurper eventually suffered the same fate as his father. One of his children, Jupiter, dethroned him with the help of the exiled Giants, who forged powerful weapons. In thanks, Jupiter freed the Giants, giving them Sicilia. This island was also settled by the enormous children of Neptune, the Cyclopes, who learned the art of forging from the Giants and became the smiths of the gods.

Unfortunately, the story does not end with this idyllic peace.

Ouranos was right; the Giants were too powerful not to set their sights on the heavens. When they attacked the gods of the sky, to reach them it is said that the Giants tore the mountains from the earth and stacked them one upon the other to reach the heavens. The ensuing battle unleashed such cataclysmic forces that it became legendary, eclipsing any other mythical clash.

The gods barely won, and this time Jupiter did not take chances, confining the Giants again. The children of Ouranos and the Ekatonchiri were sent to Tartarus, while the Cyclopes, still thought to be useful, were chained below Mount Aetna.

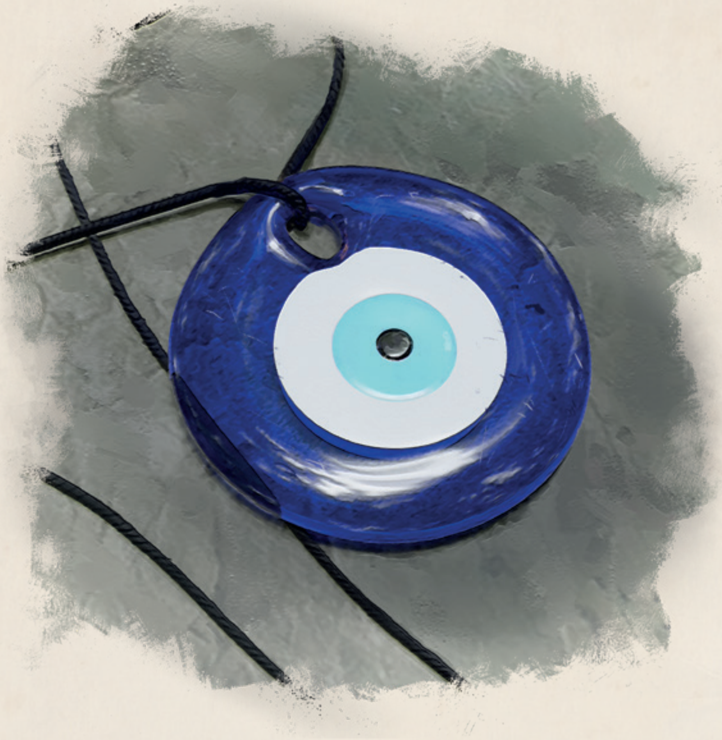
This epic war has been depicted by a great many works of art, the most famous of all perhaps the basrelief that decorates the immense altar built in Pergamon (in Asia) to celebrate the Greek victory over the Galati in the VII Century AUC. In the piece, the celestial gods are easily interpreted as an allegory of the Greeks, bringers of civilization, while the bestial Giants represent the defeated Celtic barbarians.

most refined human artisans is not enough. They want to learn how to build the *automata*, mechanical constructs moved by theurgy (see the Core Rulebook) and their own volition. Since theurgical practice is banned in the Empire, as its rituals could unleash powers so dire they could endanger Imperial authority, identifying these "smiths" is imperative.

THE EYE OF THE CYCLOPS

The members of the Free Smiths can recognize each other by a symbol they have tattooed just below the hairline, concentric circles that look like a stylized eye of a Cyclops. This symbol is positioned here on purpose, so it can be hidden under one's hair, and it is said that in ancient times it was branded with fire.

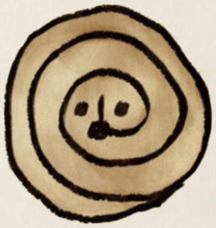
Some followers wear glass amulets, made in their own forges, inspired by the same concept, saying that they are protective charms when asked what their purpose is. This perfectly plausible, given how until now nobody had ever heard of the Free Smiths, while the symbol was extremely common all over the Mare Nostrum.



FORGOTTEN CIVILIZATIONS

I shall now cover civilizations so distant in time and space that they have disappeared from the pages of history. Looking more carefully, however, some of them could be related to what happens today in the province of Italia.

ANCIENT CAMUNI



The Camuni were a most ancient people who lived in the mountains to the north of Brixia, in the eponymous valley, the Valle Camunia or Camunica. Outside of that vale, this name is essentially meaningless, but whoever is tasked with handling security of transportation to our northern provinces must know the peculiarities of this area.

WARDENS OF THE MOUNTAINS

The Camuni are an ancient and relatively unknown people. The geographer Strabo claimed they were Raeti instead of a Gallic tribe, as their location may otherwise lead to think.

Around the IV Century AUC, they made contact with the Etruscans, who were expanding in the vale of the Padus, but the two people did not have pacific relations. However, in the VI Century, when the Gauls made their first appearance in Italia, the Camuni became their friends and exchanged both wares and traditions. The image of the Celtic god Cernunnus appears occasionally on the rocks of the Camuni mountains, and many have been mistakenly led to think they are descendants of the Celts.

In reality, the Camuni never mixed with any other peoples, proud of their ancient line of wardens of the mountains. But, in the vastness of those mountains, wardens of what?

Well, this answer belongs to the realm of speculation, as the locals still see them as necessary guardians of the peaks, a role they cannot abandon for any reason.

According to them, the very rocks hide supernatural dangers that they cannot (or do not want to) explain, but hold to be all too real. If asked, young and old tell stories, more similar to fairy tales, of creatures born of the rock, monsters moved by a primordial

THE MONSTERS OF THE CAMUNI MOUNTAINS

In the Valle Camunia, they tell the tale of an ancient breed of monsters that still today roams the mountains. In the local tongue, they are called Badalisci, and, in spite of the similarity of this name with that of the reptilian Basilisk, the two are not related. The Camuni Badaliscus is a humanoid monster that walks on two legs and is always hungry, eating anything from living creatures to plants, including rocks if nothing else is available. They ambush travelers, a much more appealing morsel than rocks, a diet of which has made their skin so tough that only a weapon made by the Camuni of an unusually strong and sharp metal can wound them. For the profile of the Badaliscus, see page 200.

hunger that live in the bowels of the mountains, capable of devouring an entire maniple of well-equipped soldiers.

Perhaps these rumors hold some truth, maybe alluding to ambushes by local brigands, successful in defeating much larger groups, hiding between the rocks. Their territory is perfect for ambushes, with some narrow gorges allowing even just one man with a good bow or the proper lever to rain arrows and stones from above and block a few tens of opponents. The Camuni, however, seem to believe in the least logical explanation. They claim that only their watch prevents the creatures of the rocks not only from killing the whole population of the mountains, but also from swarming into the plains and threatening farms and settlements.

They even say they helped none other than the troops of Rome. From 737 to 738 AUC, the Divine Augustus led a series of campaigns to conquer the Alpine chain to ease the conquest of Raetia. He sent his best generals to deal with these campaigns, Tiberius (who would then succeed him as Emperor) and his brother Drusus Major, a choice that proved to be excellent. Their successes allowed Augustus to extend the power of Rome over all the Alpine people and to the Danuvius River.

Well, the Camuni claim that it was only thanks to their help that Roman troops could move through the Alps unimpeded, possibly explaining why after the Roman conquest their vale has kept its tribal government and was joined with Brixia only administration-wise. Under the Flavi, all the Camuni were granted Roman citizenship.

MINE LORDS

The Camuni ruled over the mountains, both on their Italic side, above Comum, and on the one that today belongs to the province of Raetia, surely helped by their knowledge of the land. However, there could be another reason behind their rule.

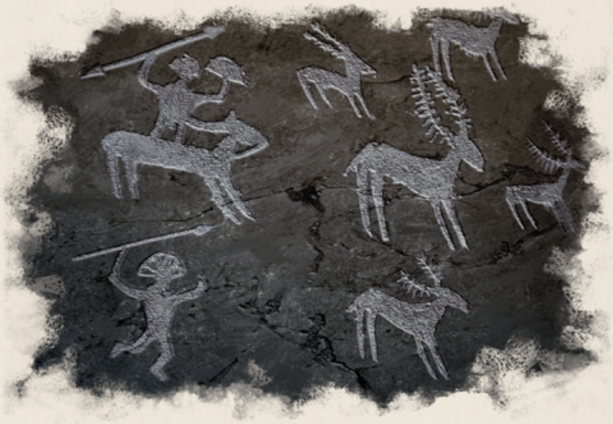
They relied on weapons of great complexity for their time, as they controlled numerous rich mines that allowed them to soon become skilled smiths and makers of items both useful and efficient. They also became rich, both selling their crafts and levying taxes against those who wished to move wares to and from Raetia, and particularly sought after even today are their swords, made with a metal that neither rusts nor loses its edge. Whether these qualities were worked into this metal or it is a material we never knew existed, the Camuni claim these are the only weapons capable of wounding the monsters that lurk in their mountains.

Still today, the Camuni know hidden ore veins that even our engineers ignore, and convincing them to let the Empire profit from this metal must first overcome their great diffidence. Sadly, I must report that we know of numerous local mining operations led without Imperial authorization.

Some mines, also, make *arsenikon*, too, the deadly "cave dust" banned by Imperial poison laws (see the *Encyclopaedia Arcana*). The Camuni defend themselves against accusations of smuggling and poisoning by explaining that they use this deadly dust only to "protect the mountains". Perhaps they use it against these rumored rock creatures?

THE "PETROGLYPHS"

Another mystery tied to the Camuni are the frequent "petroglyphs" carved on most of the rocks of the vale. They are, as their name implies, stone carvings portraying two or more intertwined symbols.



They are most likely an actual language, perhaps one not fit for long texts of literature or science, but optimized to express symbolic concepts. My bet is that this is most likely to be a system of cyphers, rather than words.

Petroglyphs are found everywhere in the vale and the surrounding mountains. However, much to our surprise, most of these signs have been carved recently, and are not damaged by the elements, suggesting that this system of symbols is still in use. Their meaning is still beyond me. Sometimes I thought I could interpret one of these carvings, looking to me like a representation of a good hunt or a warning of danger. Others could be interpreted as directions, but other times the symbols are much more abstract, looking like geometric shapes, labyrinths, or even flowers. It is impossible to understand what they are.

I can only recommend caution when crossing those lands, though. In addition to this ancient mystery, they are still roamed by very modern smugglers.

THE PEOPLE OF THE STONE TOWERS

Let us now delve into the most ancient history of humanity, and spend a few words about a people who lived in Sardinia in such ancient times that the foundation of the Urbs was still too recent to date it. The Sardi lived there when the pharaoh Rameses, the second of his name, still reigned in Egypt, more than five hundred years before the foundation of Rome, and their rule was long, for they were still there when Rome took its place in history and the Etruscans left it.

A NAMELESS CIVILIZATION

Yet, of this civilization we do not even know the name. We know of its existence only from the imposing stone towers it left everywhere on the isle.

When Rome came to take Sardinia, it found but a small population of shepherds. Only deeper in the island lived more bellicose people, raiders who descended every now and then on the coasts, pillaging and killing our soldiers. They often took to the sea to become pirates for a while, preying on the ships laden with grain or precious silver from the local mines headed to the Latium coast from Sardinia, vanishing before Rome could intervene.

I cannot say if they were the same people who built the mighty towers that we still see today, as those buildings speak of warriors, of a territory divided into tribes or clans, and of their rough wealth. They speak of people who would not have engaged in piracy in the presence of the Roman army. From their stone keeps, they would have tired us with long sieges, only to give battle to defend their lands.

Perhaps this people is no more, and the ones that live in the isle now are not of the same tribe. Only the towers are left to speak of these mighty ancients, capable of buildings worthy of giants, leaving the question about their disappearance still unanswered.

THE STONE TOWERS

Scattered all over the isle are roughly seven thousand tower-like structures, much more numerous than our castra. We do not know their name, for their builders had to have given one to their repeating structures.

We call them Daedalic Towers, because their imposing structure seems to be the work of the great builder Daedalus, the one who built the Labyrinth of Crete, while the locals call them *nurra*, or something including the root *nur*. Is it related to the ancient language of the builders, perhaps?

We still do not know what their specific use was. Some have said they were temples dedicated to the gods of the sky, as they are so tall that on their peaks one can perform the related sacrifices or even the *Sideratio*. However, those are only the words of someone who has never seen such buildings, for even by just being in their presence one feels as if being in a fortress. Ask any soldier.

The typical structure includes:

- **A circular tower.** Usually of conical shape, it is made of progressively smaller stones the taller the structure. Some can be ninety feet tall, and nine wide. The simpler compounds have only one tower, but there are some with three, forming a sort of central triangular court, and even four, with a square courtyard.
- **Inner chambers.** Often organized around the central tower, they are dug into the earth and borne by an underground dome, built with worked stones. They cannot be seen from the outside, and are accessed only through long corridors at the base of the tower.
- **Perimeter walls.** If the structure is made up of more than one tower, they are connected by mighty walls that make the complex look like a truly Cyclopean fortress.
- **Hamlet.** Around the fortified structure, one can often find traces of civilian settlements, perhaps born of the hope of being defended or even housed in the fortress should the need arise.

AN INVISIBLE ENEMY

Some military experts, however, do not agree with this interpretation. The number of these fortress-towers is too large for the relatively small size of the island, observing that if all seven thousand structures were fortresses, their makers would have been a people in constant war. So, they say, that theory must be discarded.

I, however, have another theory. I believe that they were indeed all military fortifications to defend the island, warranted by a danger so grave it required defending anywhere in the island at any moment. Not only can these towers withstand violent attacks, but their configuration made it possible to link them in a surveillance network of signaling fires on their tops. Whatever that ancient danger was, it eventually destroyed the masters of the island, and it may very well be that at some point the threat of looming foreign conquest sapped their strength against this unnamed threat.

Those who are somewhat familiar with the history of Italia would immediately think of the legends which place the Laestrygonians on this island and nearby Corsica, as it is logical that immense fortifications like those of the Sardinian towers could work against those giant tribes.

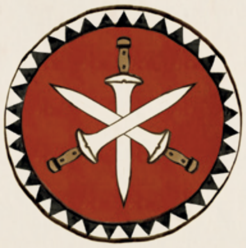
Whatever the case, today we are the masters of the island, a fact that should make us think. Rome owns the island, but does not control it with the same care and obsession as its ancient people. On the other hand, we have settled mostly on its beautiful shores, leaving the barren and hostile inner lands alone, since we know so little of them.

My advice to you, then, is to fortify the area with sturdy castella, and send numerous expeditions to investigate the less-guarded areas, as well as expert augurs to explore the stone towers. It is key to understand who their builders were, and the reasons that drove them. Perhaps this enemy is still there, invisible and forgotten, and for this very reason ready to strike again.

CONSPIRACIES

It is my duty to spend a few words on events that, though ancient history, may have repercussions on the immediate future of Rome. They are the political or idealistic inheritance of power groups that had great importance in Italia and were drastically reduced or downright destroyed by the rise of Rome. The events I will be referencing may seem ancient and remote, and some may be led to think I am excessively cautious, almost fearful, and yet in these troubled times I can feel tensions and faint shifts in opinion that could lead to more active scheming against Rome.

FOEDERATIO PRISCORUM LATINORUM (GATHERING OF THE PRISCI LATINI OR LATIN LEAGUE)



To better understand how such a danger could lurk right at the gates of the Urbs, we must delve into the history of Italia prior to the greatness of Rome.

Back at the foundation of the Urbs, Latium Vetus, the area around Rome, was already under the rule of other cities. Many of them gathered into an alliance with initially religious purposes, although later it became a military organization, too: the "Gathering of the Prisci Latini". To emphasize the Latin nature of its people, this alliance was often simply called the "Latin League".

Some of those cities are still somewhat important under Roman rule, even those that once were mightier than the Urbs, because of great shrines, wealth, or power centers. Beware, as always, that the descendants of those who have lost privileges and honors still harbor feelings of resentment.

THE CITIES OF THE LEAGUE

Latium Vetus was dotted with small settlements, at least fifty, though not all were part of the Latin League. Plinius the Elder lists only thirty, while other authors include more or less. Today it is impossible to establish the exact number, for many were destroyed during the many wars, or were absorbed into other settlements. In spite of being called "cities", they were often rather small settlements that today would not be called anything more important than a village. Three of them, Antipolis, Querquetulum, and Saturnia, were even absorbed into the very hinterlands of Rome, their names forgotten even in the neighborhoods that correspond to their ancient borders. Of all these settlements, today it is complicated not just to remember their names, but even to find any trace of their old buildings, the ancient wooden huts having been replaced by stone constructions.

The direction of this coalition was entrusted to Alba Longa, a city of illustrious Trojan descent and "older sister" of Rome, and the reason why the cities of the Latin League were also called "Alban cities". The common shrine where they celebrated their alliance is located on a mountain called *Mons Albanus.* The "capital" of the Latin League may have today disappeared, but other cities have throughout the centuries gathered relevance, and it is precisely they that worry me now, so I suggest keeping them under watch:

- **Lanuvium.** Of noble origins, it traces its foundation to Lanoios, a Trojan who fled the destruction of their city and began a new tribe in Italia. Born on the hills to the southeast of the Urbs, since the Republican age it has always been the destination of many Roman nobles, who built wonderful villas there, becoming a political hub outside of Rome. Do not underestimate this detail, for many inexplicable political decisions of the past may have been discussed in secret here, rather than the halls of the Senate, not to mention that two Emperors were born here, Antoninus Pius and Commodus. I do not wish to tarnish the reputation of this beautiful town, but it seems like the ideal place for political scheming.
- **Praeneste.** This is the seat of one of the most famous shrines in Latium, dedicated to the capricious Fortuna, mother of creation. The shrine houses a famous oracle and is an important hub for the surrounding region (see page 88), even including an apartment dedicated to the Emperor or other high-ranking guests. Security, however, is left to the bodyguards of these august personages. The shrine, in addition, is always full of pilgrims free to come and go. Nobody being ever surprised at seeing new faces, it is a perfect location for ambushes.
- **Tusculum.** Tradition claims Tusculum was founded by none other than Telegonus, son of Ulysses and Circe (see page 113). Tusculum grew close to Rome because the daughter of King Tarquinius the Proud married one of its nobles, Octavius Mamilius, a descendant of Telegonus himself. When Tarquinius was banished from Rome, the Tusculani took his side and were harshly punished, laying the foundations for a perfect rebellion. The nobility is proud, and their past defeat breeds a thirst for vengeance; combine the two elements, and the resulting poison is as virulent as it is tenacious.
- **Tibur.** In addition to being the seat of the famous shrine of Hercules Victor, it has always been an economic center of primary importance (see page 85). Thanks to the strategic location of the shrine, it is an obligatory stop for whoever moves from Rome to the Mare Adriaticum, and effectively controls the salt trade. It is also a military power, as through the shrine pass both the Via Tiburtina and the Anio River; by blocking either way, the passage of troops or wares to and from Rome would be greatly slowed, if not halted altogether. Lastly, during the Latin War, Tibur sided with the Gauls against Rome, and I strongly believe it may hide disconcerting plots and conspirators, if not investigated thoroughly.

ALBA LONGA, ELDER SISTER OF ROME

Alba Longa was equal to Rome in dignity and lineage, founded by Ascanius, the young son Aeneas, brought to Italia fleeing from the destruction of Troy, and who would then be the forefather of the twins Romulus and Remus.

Some associate the name *Alba*, "white", and *Longa*, "long", to the white sow that a prophecy claims to have directed Ascanius where to found his city. Others tie this name to the white of the clouds, hinting at the divine inspiration that led her founder. Finally, some say that the two elements of her name refer to her appearance, referring to a city with an elongated shape, made up of white houses. All these versions, however, share the almost sacred regard the ancients had for Alba Longa. Her authority was such that she was always considered the implicit capital of the Latin League, and none ever dared to question her rule.

For many long years Rome and Alba Longa had an almost sister-like relationship, but when the former was ruled by her third king, Tullus Hostilius, things changed. Rome had a surge of expansion and began challenging the hegemony of Alba Longa, so the two cities had to settle matters. Instead of an internecine war, they pitted three young Albans, the Horatii, against three Romans, the Curiatii, to fight among them. The latter eventually won, and Alba Longa yielded to Roman rule. Many Albans, however, had no intention of accepting this defeat and riled their king, Fufetius, against the Romans. Tullus Hostilius, learning of the conspiracy, had all the Alban nobles and King Fufetius killed and the city destroyed, and now not even the memory of the location where this noble city stood is left.

- **Velitrae.** Founded by the Volsci, it was probably one of the wealthiest cities of the Latin League. I include it in the list because it is the object of a prophecy. In ancient times, a lightning bolt struck its walls, turning the stone into something similar to polished glass instead of damaging it. The prodigy was interpreted as the omen that a son of Velitrae would one day attain absolute power. Since the family of the Emperor Augustus, the gens Octavia, came from there, it was always believed this prediction was about Augustus' own rise to the throne. After him, however, the prophecy was thought to have run its course, and was set aside. It seems that recently it has surfaced again, although whispered with different tones, and bearing a less than reassuring meaning.

THE FEDERAL SHRINE OF MONS ALBANUS

The numerous cities of the Latin League shared devotion to a shrine dedicated to Jupiter on Mons Albanus, a solitary mountain to the southeast of Rome. A 20-mile-long road called Via Sacra snakes from Rome to the mount, connecting the Urbs to other sacred places, like the lake of Diana and the shrine to Diana Nemorensis (see page 69).

From the slopes of the mount, a roughly 4-mile path worthy of a true pilgrimage climbs to the top, where is the shrine of Jupiter Latiaris, "Jupiter of Latium", founded by Ascanius, the son of the Trojan hero Aeneas and progenitor of Romulus and Remus.

In that sacred place, every year at the end of April were held the Feriae Latinae, celebrations that gathered all the people of Latium Vetus. These holidays opened with a solemn procession up the slopes of the mountain, leading a white bull to be offered to Jupiter. At the temple, on the altar in front of the sacred building, after the solemn sacrifice, the viscera of the animal were examined for omens and the meat boiled and then distributed amongst the participants.

This ceremony was purely social, strengthening the bonds between the cities of the Latin League, and had no part in electing a leader whose authority was superior that of any other city, unlike the ruler of the Etruscan League (see page 158). The leader of the Latin League was and always remained the King of Alba Longa, until the moment Rome destroyed it and took over. Out of religious pietas, the shrine was not destroyed, but the cult of Jupiter Latiaris was moved to the Capitoline Hill and its magnificent temple dedicated to the god.

On the top of Mons Albanus, however, the sacrifices have never stopped. Nobody dares to ban them, but this respectable weakness could cost us much one day. We have no idea of who these people are who gather every year at the end of April to sacrifice a white bull to Jupiter, so I suggest accurate investigations are in order, to ensure this is not another movement to restore the *Foederatio Priscorum Latinorum*.

LATIN WARS: A LONG SERIES OF HOSTILITIES

In the early days of Rome, no city of the Latin League was hostile to her, but it was only natural that as she grew, so did her enemies, to the point where eventually the goal of the Latin League became stemming the power of Rome. Had she attacked the other cities, all would have banded against her. A first war broke out, ending in 257 AUC with the Roman victory at the battle of the Lacus Regillus, one that made history, not only because it was the beginning of Roman might, but also because legends claim that our troops were helped by the divine twins Castor and Pollux.

After this victory, in 260 AUC was signed the *Foedus Cassianum*, "Treaty of Cassius", named after its proposer, Consul Spurius Cassius Vecellinus, forming another alliance and establishing a solid truce, with the intent of including Rome in the Latin brotherhood. For example, it allowed then-forbidden weddings between Romans and Latins. The League grew able to push back the Equi and the Volsci, bellicose people of central Italia, as the joint command, held by a Latin and a Roman leader, worked excellently. Even the distribution of the spoils of war was not an issue, clearly regulated by the *Foedus Cassianum*.

Even the Etruscan presence, much more powerful back then, was greatly reduced as Rome conquered the Etruscan city of Veii, determining the beginning of the decline of that old civilization.

At that point, however, Rome, strong in her greater importance in the Latin League, demanded to take the lead of the federation, as well as other privileges. Her original allies then declared the *Foedus Cassianum* dissolved.

Fighting broke out anew, pitting Rome against various Latin cities, between 413 and 415 AUC. This long period of hostilities was named the Latin War by historians, although being so fragmented, it should have been referred to in the plural.

Eventually victorius, in 415 AUC, Rome declared the League dissolved, and was now the only power to rule over Latium Vetus.

THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE TWELVE PEOPLES (ETRUSCAN LEAGUE)

The Etruscan matter, I trust, has already been presented to you by people more versed in the arcane than I am (see page 122), so I shall limit my comments to the strictly political.

You surely know by now that in ancient Etruria, before Rome, there were twelve cities that ruled over all the others: Arretium, Caere, Clusium, Cortona, Perusia, Rusellae, Tarquinia, Veii, Vetulonia, Volsinii, Volaterrae, and Volci, also collectively referred to as "the Dodecapolis" or "the twelve cities". Since each was still independent of all the others, we could define it a federation of free cities.

The nature of this federation is thought to be purely religious, as the representatives of those twelve cities gathered every year at the shrine of the god Voltumna to celebrate the end of the closing cycle and the beginning of the following one. A religious New Year's Eve, in short.

There is, however, evidence that this yearly gathering had a political purpose, too. The twelve emissaries had elected an overlord, a king with authority over the entire federation, and it seems that the Etruscan League has somehow resisted the tide of the centuries that has erased their people from prominence. My fear is that it could still infiltrate the highest echelons of the Empire.

THE TWELVE *LUCUMONES*

The emissaries of these twelve cities were titled *lucumon* (plural, *lucumones*), the Latinization of a now-forgotten Etruscan word. My research seems to hint that the original term was *lauchum*.

The lucumones had military and religious authority, in addition to their political role, in a similar fashion to the ancient *rex* of Rome, who back at the dawn of our nation was both a leader in war and the first priest of our people. If one then considers the skill of the Etruscans in the supernatural, it would come as no surprise if these lucumones were among the most skilled priests of their respective communities.

My understanding of the matter is that the lucumones were the mediators between humankind and the many deities of the Etruscan pantheon, and had supernatural powers granted to them by the Haruspices at the moment of their election, most likely including interrogating the divine will and interpreting it to the advantage of their people.

Each lucumon received, when they took office, a crimson cloak, a golden crown, a scepter, a ritual two-headed axe, and the right to sit on an ivory throne. The symbol of their power was a bundle of staves tied together around an axe, indicating their charge as supreme judge of their people, with the power to apply punishment, even the capital one, a symbol that then passed into signifying political power in Rome, too.

THE ZILATH RASNAL

The image of the bundle of staves may represent something else, though. Our scholars who have discussed these matters in further detail, Servius and Titus Livius, claim the twelve lucumones gathered yearly to elect a federal leader, with authority over the whole Etruscan people. The original title of this leader should have been *zilath mechl Rasnal*, "the leader (*zilath*) of the people (*mechl*) of Etruria (*Rasnal*)". The Etruscan bundle of staves, then, would represent the twelve lucumones (the staves) and their overlord (the axe around which the staves are fastened).

It is difficult today to understand what prerogatives this leader had, but surely they must have held *imperium*, supreme command, much like our Emperor.

According to Titus Livius, however, the leader of the Etruscan League was essentially a *sacerdos*, a priest, perhaps because the usual recipient of that position had great supernatural skills. It was the zilath who celebrated the "rite of the nail", driving a ritual nail into a sacred building of the shrine to Voltumna to celebrate the passage from one year to the next. These nails were counted to keep track of the passing of the "cycles", the periods the gods would have assigned to the various peoples to rule on earth (see page 124). Because of this specific function, the zilath would most likely have had a much clearer grasp of the future than any Roman priest.

I have consulted scholars who attempted to unravel the last secrets of Etruscan lore, and they claim the zilath was a Haruspex, one of the most skilled Etruscan seers, and a Fulgurator, capable of unleashing the power of lightning (see page 131). The resulting figure, then, is somebody capable of efficiently leading an army in war, but also weaving long-winded political schemes.

A CONSPIRACY FROM CENTURIES PAST

This is the danger I believe to have seen during my travels in Etruria. Numerous elements lead me to suspect that this Etruscan League has not disappeared, instead simply moving into the shadows of history, to erode Roman supremacy like an underground river does to the sturdiest rocks.

The Etruscan League reached the height of its power in the III Century AUC, ruling not just over Etruria proper, but also beyond the Padus, in Campania and the seas. Then, parallel to the rise of Rome, began their slow but unstoppable decline. The fatal blow was most likely the Roman conquest of Veii, the closest Etruscan city to Rome, in 357 AUC, and the lucumones were then absorbed by Roman magistrates, who took over the Dodecapolis and beyond. Here, however, is the genius of this people who, in spite of defeat, the expropriation of their lands, and the absorption of their rituals into another religion, or perhaps because of this, chose to conquer their conqueror in such a subtle way.

The lucumones have not really disappeared. Many of their descendants sit today in the Senate, in plain sight, not as the heirs of defeated enemies. Rather, this long bloodline that links them to the time in which Rome was still young, and Etruria powerful, is today an element of nobility. Many of Etruscan blood still today prefer to use their Etruscan names instead of the Latinized versions, often earning admiration, and interest in the ancient origins of their families. As a consequence, those who can prove their bloodline are respected and considered equal by our patricians, although the title of "patrician" is only for the lines of the companions of Romulus.

There is the concrete risk that their presence in the Senate and between the highest echelons of the state is deliberate. After a careful investigation, I can claim we are in the presence of a conspiracy that spans centuries, although I must admit I still lack evidence.

I could not determine whether the many Etruscans who today sit in the Senate descend from the twelve specific cities of the Etruscan League, or hail from all over Etruria. It is hard to find such ancient lore, and there is no Retrocognition ritual that can help me.

My feeling is that the Etruscan League turned from a political federation into a secret conspiracy, and I believe that the Etruscans of old, realizing their defeat, have played the long gambit for their vengeance. This is likely made possible by the greater skill of their priests in reading the omens, so, perhaps, we may have mistakenly believed to have learned from them all we could, while instead glimpsing only a pale imitation. The Etruscans have seen further than us for centuries, and planned accordingly, step by step, their approach to the throne of Rome. I fear that one day soon that on that throne will no longer sit an *Imperator*, but a *zilath*.

PORSENNA, LUCUMON OF CLUSIUM

Perhaps the only Etruscan lucumon of whom we still know the name is Porsenna of the city of Clusium, although, according to how the historians describe him, he could have been a much more powerful *zilath*. Although the Etruscans never united into one nation, Plinius the Elder, Dyonisus of Halicarnassos, and Florus call him "king of Etruria", a monicker whose closest approximation is the zilath, the leader of the Dodecapolis, who claimed authority over the entire Etruscan League.

Another clue about his position of zilath is the description of his peculiar skills and ability in giving battle.

We know that around the half-way point of the III Century AUC, Porsenna moved to help King Tarquinius the Proud, banished from Rome for his impious conduct, and in the attempt to place Tarquinius back on the throne, Porsenna declared war on the Urbs and laid siege to our city. Titus Livius tells that, *"Non unquam alias ante tantus terror senatum invasit, adeo valida res tum Clusina erat magnumque Porsennae namen"*, "Never before had the Senate felt such fear, such were the might of Clusiusm and the fame of Porsenna."

Their terror was justified, because Porsenna probably possessed the ancient lore of summoning bolts of lightning, a knowledge only the most powerful and skilled Etruscans could wield (see page 131).

Tarquinius was not reinstated, however, and Porsenna did not defeat Rome, as he admired so much the Roman virtue shown by the young Horatius Cocles, Mucius Scaevola, and Clelia that he abandoned his inconvenient ally and left Latium. Porsenna headed to the wealthy countryside, but the cities of Cumae and Aricia opposed him, so he sent his son Aruns to fight them, resulting in the young warrior's death in battle. With his son dead, Porsenna lost the will to continue the campaign in southern Italia and returned to Clusium. There he died, and was buried in a now-legendary tomb alongside, legends claim, a golden chariot pulled by twelve golden horses and secret texts about powerful rituals of Etruscan magic.

THE CELTIC RING

The Italic area that includes the Padan Plain was for a long time a Celtic holding, although we call the Celts of Italia “Gauls”, like those beyond the Alps in the modern province of Gaul. To tell them apart, we called the Italic Gallic lands “Cisalpine Gaul”, the Gaul “this side of the Alps”, while anything beyond that became “Transalpine Gaul”.

The Celts were a great family that included many different people and extended westward to the Iberian Peninsula and eastward to the modern province of Asia. To the north, they settled the isles of Britannia, and to the south the Padan Plain. The Gauls came to Italia through the Alps in numerous migrations between the III and the IV Century AUC, attracted by wine, a commodity they loved dearly but could not make themselves. They stayed because, in addition to wine, they found fertile lands and a pleasant climate. In addition, since they were expert warriors, they had reason to work as mercenaries for the those who fought for supremacy in Italia between the II and III Century AUC, especially the Carthaginians and the Greeks of Sicilia.

Mentioning the Greeks, we can safely compare their influence on southern Italia to that of the Gauls on the northern lands. Italia was for a long time split into two halves, one of Greek culture and the other of Gallic influence.

I shall not go over again all of the processes that led to Rome ruling over both, and any other powers of the region. They are well known, and you can more easily ask scholars who know more than me (see page 14).

The only thing I will say is that our people and the Celts were enemies from the beginning, fighting anywhere in the world we have met them. After our victory, even after offering them a pardon, integration, and freedom, they swore vengeance, for our differences were too deep. Where we are collected and rational, great planners and administrators, they are born of instinct and satisfied only with immediate conquest and easy plunder. It is not easy to form alliances with people more prone to raiding than politics.

FEROCIOUSLY LOYAL

The main reason why peaceful relations between us and the Celts have always been impossible is the ferocious loyalty they have only for their own kind. They swore terrible vengeance against those who violated pacts with them, but did not feel obligated in the same way by their pacts with other people.

THE *METUS GALLICUS*

The descent of the Gauls into Italia and their advance on Rome in the V Century AUC were preceded by a wave of panic called *Metus Gallicus*, the Gallic Terror. The Italic people feared the irrational fury with which the Gauls gave battle and the slaughter that followed their victories. They started with prisoners, killing even women and children after atrocious torments, then moved on the local civilians.

However, the Gauls were harsh on their own people, too. Among the many legends, one tells that whenever the *Concilium Armatum*, the gathering of their warriors, was called, the last fighter to arrive was tortured and then offered to the gods to ingratiate them in the coming battle.

Similar tales traveled faster than the Gallic armies, spreading all over Italia, terrifying the populace well before the Gauls arrived, making them often flee and leave their homes and lands to the invaders.

Centuries later, Julius Caesar himself witnessed Gallic cruelty. In 701 AUC, during the long siege of the Gallic city of Alesia, the Gauls tied their women and children outside of the walls, for the Roman legions to see them, to reduce the number of mouths to feed and dedicate as much food as possible to the warriors. The second, of course, was to goad the Romans into taking the poor souls in and feeding them. Caesar obviously forbade our troops from approaching the civilians, condemning them to die of starvation under the pained eyes of the legionaries and the indifference of their husbands and fathers.

In Rome, we still remember with dreadful anger Brennus, the Gaul chief who conquered Rome in 366 AUC. He demanded a ransom of a thousand pounds of gold to leave the city, but the measuring scale had been tampered with, and some complained of the deception. Brennus then answered by throwing another weight on the scales, that of his sword, shouting *“Vae victis!”*, “Conquered, beware,” meaning that those who had been defeated had lost the right to justice, and demanding that the weight of his sword in gold be added to what had already been weighed. Neither can we forget that, during the Punic Wars, at the bloody battle of the Lake Trasimenus in 536 AUC, the Insubri riders fighting on our side deserted as a group to side with Hannibal. And yet not even Hannibal trusted the Gauls. When traveling their lands, he changed disguises multiples times a day, tasking his brother Mago with following him with the rearguard when

THE *LITANA SILVA*: THE FORGOTTEN FOREST

Not only must the Gallic presence in Italia be kept in check, but its absence, too. A territory in Regio VIII (Aemilia) looks domesticated through precise Roman plotting, but hides the still-bleeding memory of a Gallic ambush, a slaughter of Roman legions that still cries for vengeance from the gods. It was a deep, thick forest, and yet we cannot now point with precision to its location, for it has disappeared into history.

The event happened during the Second Punic War, in the VI Century AUC. Hannibal was in Italia and had already gained the alliance of the Gauls who ruled over the lands between Mediolanum, the Appennine Mountains, the plains of Aemilia, the coasts of Umbria, and the Insubri, Boii, Lingoni, and Sènoni. Defeating our troops in the ruinous battle of the Trasimenus, he was headed to Apulia to spend the winter there. The Senate then chose to send a great army to fight Hannibal, and a minor one to destroy the Gaul hosts watching the conqueror's rear to the north. Hannibal won again, defeating our troops at Cannae. The Gauls, driven by this new victory of their Carthaginian ally, became greatly hostile. Consul Lucius Postumius Albinus, in 537 AUC, led two legions and numerous allies, totaling twenty-five thousand soldiers, through the Padan Plain and eventually crossed this immense forest, the Litana Silva, not far from where today stands Forum Livii.

The Gauls had laid a bold ambush, cutting all the trees, but propping them up so they took only a gentle push to make them fall to the ground. Our legions delved into the forest without suspecting anything, and soon the trees began falling on them. Their horses then panicked and fled, causing more logs to fall.

Few saved themselves, and those few were massacred by the Gauls. From Consul Postumius, fallen in battle, was cut the head, and his skull was cast in gold and used as a cup for religious rites.

The forest was declared "nefas", a place of ill omen, and to be left as it was, consecrated to the souls of the fallen. Instead, for the memory of such slaughter was intolerable, it was entirely cut down bit by bit, burned to the ground, and eventually turned into agricultural land. The name was struck with the *damnatio memoriae*, condemnation of memory, from any map.

Because of this, today nobody knows where it is. Or, better, modern-day Romans do not know where it is. The descendants of the local Gauls, in contrast, consider it a sacred place. It even seems that they still secretly sacrifice to their bloodthirsty gods among innocent wheat.

he crossed the Appennines, not trusting his Gallic "allies".

To honor their gods, the Gauls had customs that we would call nothing short of abhorrent. For the god Teutates they soaked the head of a man in a basin, to Taranis they dedicated men burned alive, and for Esus they hanged a man from a tree until he bled out and died.

Anywhere the Gauls passed, then, our gods were challenged with intolerable blood sacrifices and the breaking of covenants, a capital crime to Jupiter.

THE TRANSNATIONAL BROTHERHOOD

This tight bond between tribes, even those that occasionally fought with one another, is the basis of the danger I am explaining here.

Agents undercover in various regions of the Empire confirm that there is a stirring between the Gallic and Celtic clans, a push to a new union. In fact, we have more than once heard an expression that does not bode anything good, the formation of a "Celtic Ring", a brotherhood with the goal of reuniting the people that once shared Celtic religion and customs all over the Empire. It would be an enormous coalition, millions of people strong, and many Imperial legionaries in at least five provinces, such as Italia, Gallia, Germania, Britannia, and Raetia, with potential participation from Iberia, and perhaps even Asia. A danger of unimaginable potential!

The core of this Celtic Ring are the tribes that historically had the strongest relationships:

- **Aquitani**, in Gaul between the Garumna River and the Pyrenees;
- **Belgi**, between the northern coasts of Gaul and the Rhenus River, near the borders of Germania;
- **Elvetii**, in the province of Germania between the upper Rhenus and upper Danuvius;
- **Cisalpine** Gauls, in the Padan Plain.

The geographic distance between these people plays in our favor. Between them are not just natural obstacles, like the Alps, but also political ones, the areas where Roman culture has always been well-rooted, such as Gallia Narbonensis.
Italia, unfortunately, is still greatly exposed to this conspiracy, as the Padus is one of the wealthiest areas of the province.

THE DREAM OF THE "GALLIC NATION"

Just because the Italic Gauls and the Celts from other provinces have been integrated for centuries into Roman society, we must not believe they have forgotten their tribal bonds. Numerous Italic cities have reported an awakening of a Gallic "identity", an awareness of their ancient history paired with the regret of having lost such a large territory, and *torques*, Celtic necklaces, are once again seen on the necks of Roman citizens otherwise beyond reproach.

That a "Gallic nation" has never existed does not matter, as this regret has little to do with real facts. Many of the youngest, born and raised in the arms of Rome, perhaps spoiled by the peace and abundance of the Empire, have fallen in love with an unrealistic ideal, and are easily caught up by conspiracies. Such a phenomenon is truly surprising, and also greatly ungrateful. The Gauls received a treatment of favor, once defeated. Julius Caesar, the author of their definitive demise, granted the Gauls Roman citizenship, and a few decades later Emperor Claudius admitted numerous of them into the Senate, with many druids becoming officially recognized Roman priests.

Unfortunately, there is a very dangerous precedent that the conspirators have taken as their model. Between 1012 and 1027 AUC came a time of crisis for our Empire, as Gaul and Britannia seceded and formed their own "Gallic empire", nominally held by usurpers elected by their own troops, but in truth ruled by a coalition of druids. This false empire was soon defeated by the great Aurelianus, but revenge was sown like poisonous seeds in our lands. With this model in mind, the Celtic Ring aims to rebuild this empire, expanding on the lands their kin ruled in ancient times.

THE DRUIDS

Because I have mentioned the role of the druids in the secession of the Gauls, I must give some explanation. Although the conspiracy I am about to explain has mostly political goals, its religious aspects must not be overlooked.

The only unifying element in the great Gallic diversity has always been the presence of the druids, priests without a temple, scholars without books. The druids had in ancient times a role above that of tribal limitations, and every Gallic tribe, even if warring with the others, respected the authority of the druids, who could freely cross the lands in war.

Once the Gallic matter was settled, the druids were forced to renounce their religious practices and teachings in the conquered lands. Those who did not comply were cut down without mercy. Famous was the destruction of the main druidic shrine in Britannia, on the Isle of Mona, by Gaius Suetonius Paolinus in 814 AUC. As it often happens, even among the general hostility there was a group of druids not ill-disposed towards Rome. These druids, then, were rewarded, and at the same time put under surveillance with an astute political maneuver; they were "turned" into Flamines Augustales, municipal priests of the main cities (for additional information on these priesthoods, see the *Encyclopaedia Arcana*). They were not deprived of the honors due to their role of priests, and were absorbed into the official organization of Rome, where they could be kept under discreet watch. Today we are forced to reconsider this choice. It is likely that this faction had long-term goals and found the Pax Romana useful for their own reasons, so I would hate that such generosity today be turned against Rome, since our enemies would then already be hiding within the heart of the provincial institutions.

THE CELTIC RISK

Unfortunately, I cannot say with precision where the conspirators of the Celtic Ring hide in Italia. I can, however, give a list of locations of the Gallic tribes that in the history of the province have had greater importance, so you can reinforce surveillance, for there is where today are the most clues about the Celtic Ring. I, then, recommend the same be done in other provinces. Those tribes are:

- **Boii**. They settled the Padan Plain in ancient times, coming, according to Plinius the Elder, from Aquitania. They were since the beginning a great threat to the Etruscans, from whom they took the city of Felsina, renaming it Bononia, after their own name. The Boii are sadly known for having destroyed two entire Roman legions and thousands of allies in the ambush of the Litana Silva. Where that slaughter took place are still descendants of the Boii who, in hushed terms, boast of this victory, so they require special surveillance.
- **Carni**. The most isolated tribe, the presence of Veneti, Histri, and Camuni prevented the Gallic tribes from occupying central modern Regio X (Venetia and Histria), so the Carni remained cut off from the other Gauls and had to content themselves with the mountains above Aquileia. However, we must not let our guard down because of their smaller involvement. Aquileia is a key military and trade hub for the Empire, and the presence of a Celtic conspiracy could cause it great harm.
- **Cenomani**. I mention them because they could be useful helpers in a secret investigation into the new Gallic coalitions. Born of Gallia Lugdunensis, they crossed the Alps around the V Century AUC and banished the Etruscans from the region to the south of Lacus Benacus. Here they settled peacefully, and inherited many customs of their Veneti neighbors. Perhaps this was the reason why they did not join the alliance of the other Gauls with Hannibal, staying instead loyal to Rome.
- **Insubri**. According to Titus Livius, they came to Italia long before the other Celts, as early as the II Century AUC. Around the IV Century, they founded their main city, Medhelan, today Mediolanum. They are perhaps the most dangerous, because they are not just brutal warriors. They know how to write in an alphabet they share

with the Lepontii. Their influence does not seem to have stopped at Mediolanum, where there is a temple dedicated to the Gallic goddess Birgit.

- **Lepontii**. They occupied a wide territory of the central-western Alps, today split between the provinces of Italia (Regio XI - Transpadana) and Raetia. Their origin is still disputed. The historian Polibius claimed they were related to the Liguri, however the geographer Strabo said, instead, they were related to the Camuni. They contested a few parts of plains with the Padus Etruscans, from whom, however, they learned the art of writing. They then developed their own alphabet, the Lepontius, and their presence is still strong in the cities of Oscela Lepontorum and Bilitio.
- **Lingones**. They settled in Italia in the V Century AUC, from central Gaul. They occupied the region of the Padus closest to its mouth, where they had contacts with the Etruscans of Spina, with whom they lived in peace. Great warriors, they were absorbed into our own army. Two centuries ago, two cohorts of them were sent to Britannia, where they acclimated extremely well, inducing me to advise caution regarding the relations between these Italic Gauls and the Britannic Celts.
- **Salassi**. Occupying now the area in Regio XI (Transpadana) around Augusta Praetoria, the city is even of Gallic foundation, and before Rome bore the name of Cordelia. The lands of the Salassi were always of key strategic importance, as they control the Alpine passes to and from Gaul. This people, then, handled for a long time the local trade, and Hannibal allied with them when he crossed the Alps. Rome was then forced to subjugate them, deporting a great number of them to other regions. The city of Cordelia was then turned into a military castra, from which came modern-day Augusta.
- **Sènones**. Their ancestral lands are in modern Regio VIII (Aemilia), to the south of the mouth of the Padus, and in Regio VI (Umbria), between the Appennines and the coast. This territory worries me greatly, as it is still today called *ager gallicus*, the Gallic district. The main city of the area, Sena Gallica, still keeps in her name the memory of her ancient people. They are also the Gauls that today we must fear the most, for it was they who sacked Rome. The name of their leader, Brennus, who led the assault on the Capitoline Hill and imposed heavy tributes, still causes anger in any proper Roman. Among all the Gallic people of Italia, they were punished with exemplary harshness; all their adult males were killed, and their women and children sold into slavery. It is then completely understandable that here hatred for Rome still flows strong.
- **Taurini**. I mention this tribe only for the sake of completeness, since I have already mentioned the Liguri (see page 137). Between the II and VI Century AUC, they occupied the area around Augusta Taurinorum in Regio XI (Transpadana), although they are not a tribe of pure Gallic descent, but of both Gauls and Liguri. Perhaps because of this diversity from all the other local tribes, they had a very different history. They formed at some point an actual independent kingdom, the Principate of the Cottii, in the mountains above Augusta Taurinorum, which Rome let prosper, and still today the region has a peculiar relationship with Imperial rule.

THE LANGUAGE OF THE ITALIC GAULS

Although with the due differences, the Italic Gallic tribes shared a common language that we today call “language of the Cisalpine Gaul”. Its main bulk is made up of the language spoken by the people who lived on the western reaches of the Alps, such as Insubres, Cenomani, and Sènones. When the Gauls of the Transalpine area, the one beyond the Alps, reached Italia, Insubres, Cenomani, and Sènones moved to new settlements, and their language spread to a much larger area, enriching its nuances and absorbing terms from the newcomers. Cisalpine Gallic and its Transalpine counterpart, however, remain today two similar but different languages.

The Cisalpine Gauls began writing their own language with the alphabet used by the Lepontii, a demonstration of how the circulation of languages and cultures has been beneficial. The Lepontii derived their own alphabet from the Etruscan one, although a common writing never spread much among the Gauls of Italia.

Of course, today their main language is still Latin, mandatory in any official document, as well as the common speech. It cannot be denied, anyway, that anywhere of Gallic origin their inhabitants commonly speak a local dialect born of the ancient Cisalpine Gallic language.

* * *

Allow me to close this report by recommending that you not take this investigation of mine as truth, as accurate as it may be. The secrets of Italia are still many and well hidden, and just one person cannot reveal them all. It will be then necessary to send many more undercover agentes or specialized investigators capable of mingling with the many Italic peoples to unearth events whose consequences may have a strong influence on the future of the Empire.

AD MAIOREM ROMAE GLORIAM!

PART IV

NEW RULES

There are numerous sorts of magic. Practised with water, for instance, it grants a foreknowledge of things to come.

Pliny the Elder

Natural History book XXX, chap. 5, 2

I This section contains the rules for new Italic magic rituals.

Because Italia is a land blessed by a great abundance of water and springs, here developed a special water-based Divination variant, in addition to what the Cohors Arcana already teaches to its members, as well as a new ritual for interpreting dreams.

Among the new, powerful rituals from the tolerated cults is an ancient, more powerful, version of the *Ars Fulguratoria*, from the mysterious land of Etruria, and until now considered only a legend.

From this ancient land are also the new Indigitamenta, invocations to the Di Indigetes, so ancient they have been forgotten by the majority of the citizens of the Empire.

There are also new pieces of equipment, useful in every adventure, from the special burning mirrors of Archimedes, which harness the power of the sun, to the mythical wings of Daedalus, as well as a selection of weapons and armor used by many Italic peoples.

NEW RITUALS

HYDROMANCY

Hydromancy is a special water-based Divination discipline. Although Italia is famous for its magical springs, any water can be used for this ritual, as long as it is pure.

Hydromancy is formed of many rituals performed in different ways, often using specific items in conjunction with water. The Specialty that applies to the roll to perform them is *Hydromancy*, and its Difficulty Threshold is 6.

CEROMANCY

Discipline. Hydromancy (DT 6)

Cost. 6 Pietas

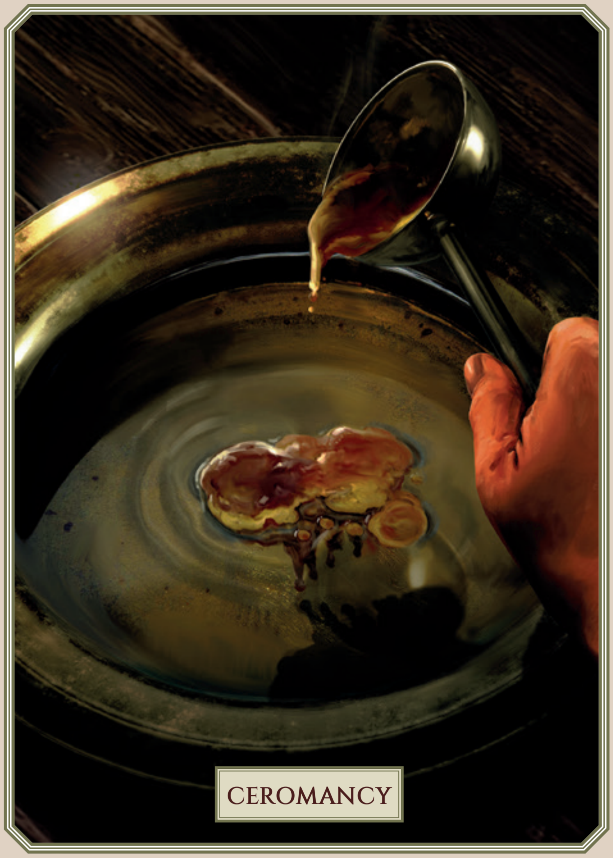
Duration. Short (a few minutes)

Procedure. By throwing molten wax (*cera*, in Latin) into water and observing how it solidifies and agglomerates, the speed at which shifts, and the shape it takes, the officiant reads the future. The ritual provides a positive or negative response regarding a person, a fact, or an action about to happen or recently happened.

The same Divination can be performed with lead, though this practice is frowned upon because lead is often associated with hostile or even outright evil gods (the difficulty is 1 level lower, but the ritual is considered belonging to the forbidden cults).

Response. Positive (*fas*) or negative (*nefas*). The higher the Degree of Success, the more detailed the response.

Cost of learning. 60 Curriculum Points



CEROMANCY

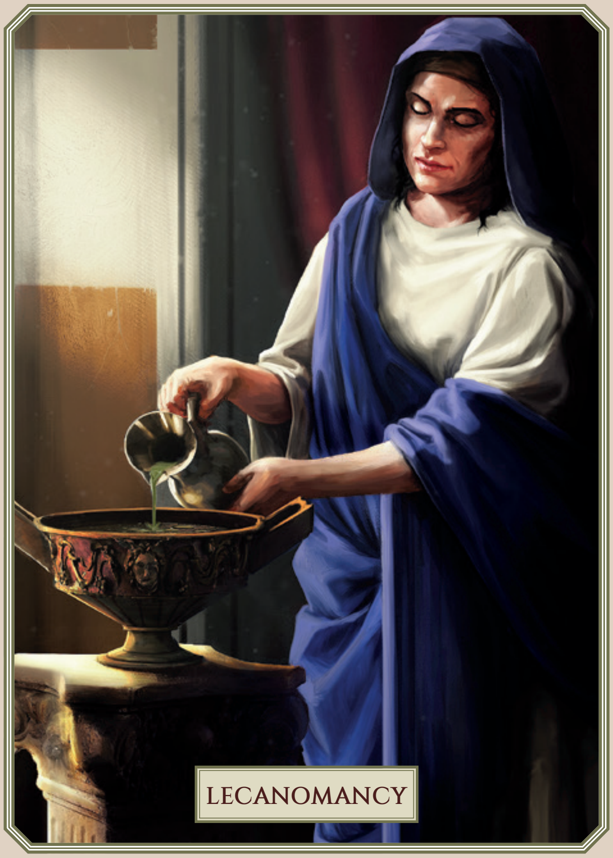
RITUALS OF HYDROMANCY

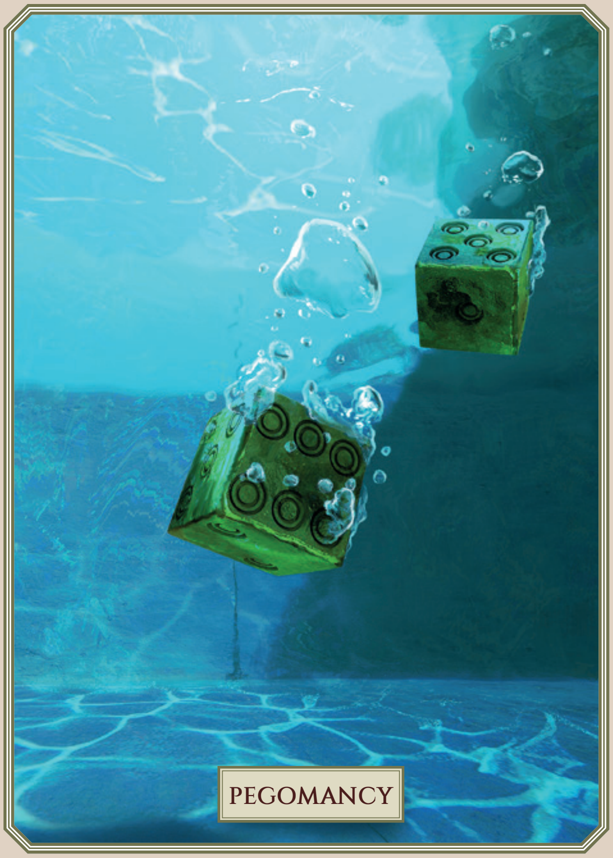
LECANOMANCY

Discipline. Favor of the Gods (DT 6), Hydromancy (DT 6)
Cost. 6 Pietas
Duration. Short (a few minutes)
Procedure. By filling a consecrated vessel (a *lekane*, in Greek) with water, adding sacred oil, and observing how it spreads in the water, the officiant obtains an oracle. Most often, seers check whether the oil spreads in small droplets or large agglomerates, condenses in stripes, forms figures, or if it simply sinks to the bottom of the vessel.
Response. A I Degree of Success allows the officiant to obtain a positive (*fas*) or negative (*nefas*) response about a person, a fact, or an action, whether impending or just occurred, and to sense whether one or more deities are favorable, indifferent, or opposed to the object of the Divination. Further Degrees of Success do not provide additional details.
Cost of learning. 60 Curriculum Points

PEGOMANCY

Discipline. Hydromancy (DT 6)
Cost. 3 Pietas
Duration. Brief (a few instants)
Procedure. In this ritual, the officiant throws something into a calm body of water, such as a common fountain (*pegè* in Greek). The response is given by observing how the water reacts to the items, and yields a positive or negative response about a person, a fact, or an action, whether impending or just occurred. This was the favored ritual of Emperor Tiberius, who used to practice it with dice.
Response. A I Degree of Success allows the officiant to obtain a positive (*fas*) or negative (*nefas*) response. Further Degrees of Success do not provide additional details.
Cost of learning. 60 Curriculum Points


LECANOMANCY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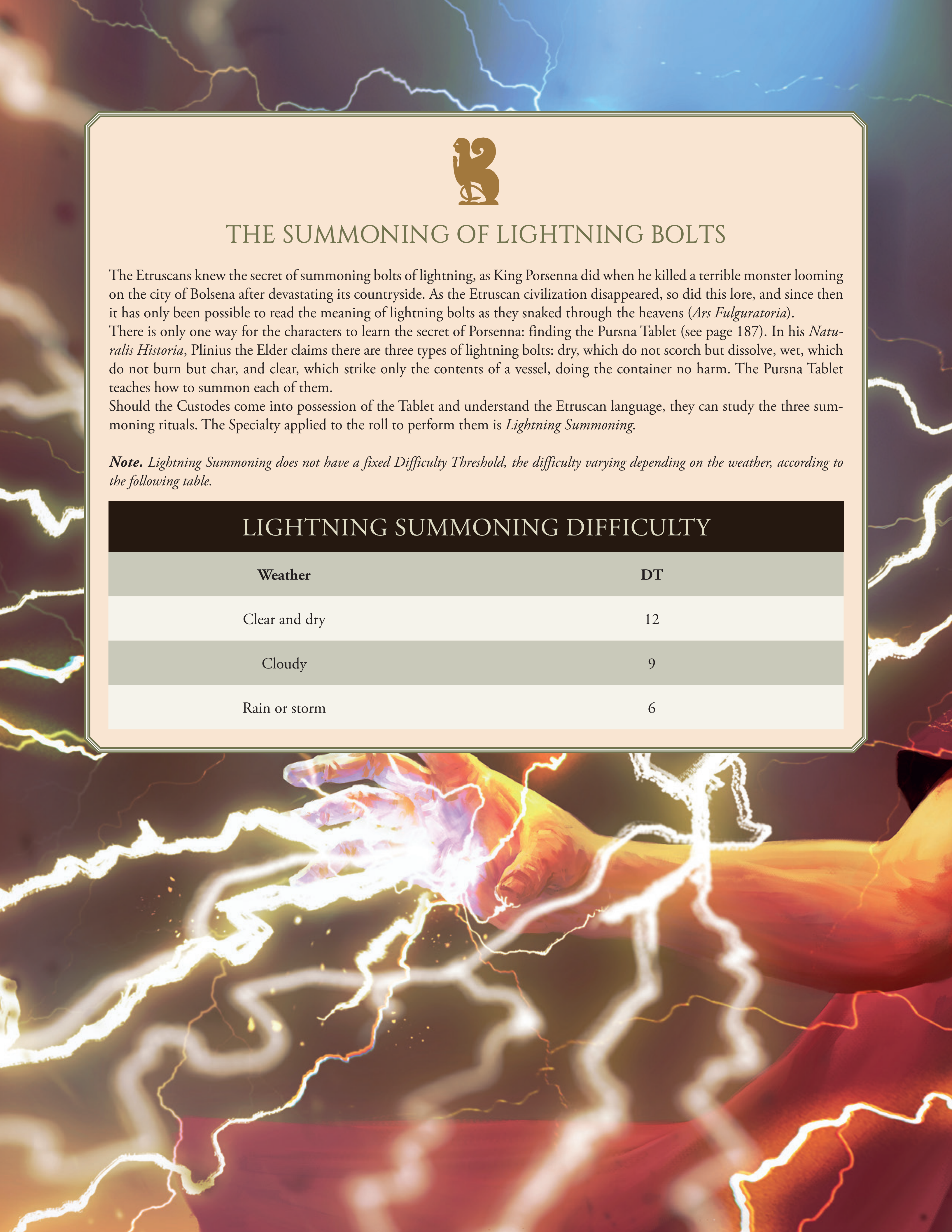


THE SUMMONING OF LIGHTNING BOLTS

The Etruscans knew the secret of summoning bolts of lightning, as King Porsenna did when he killed a terrible monster looming on the city of Bolsena after devastating its countryside. As the Etruscan civilization disappeared, so did this lore, and since then it has only been possible to read the meaning of lightning bolts as they snaked through the heavens (*Ars Fulguratoria*).

There is only one way for the characters to learn the secret of Porsenna: finding the Pursna Tablet (see page 187). In his *Naturalis Historia*, Plinius the Elder claims there are three types of lightning bolts: dry, which do not scorch but dissolve, wet, which do not burn but char, and clear, which strike only the contents of a vessel, doing the container no harm. The Pursna Tablet teaches how to summon each of them.

Should the Custodes come into possession of the Tablet and understand the Etruscan language, they can study the three summoning rituals. The Specialty applied to the roll to perform them is *Lightning Summoning*.

Note. *Lightning Summoning does not have a fixed Difficulty Threshold, the difficulty varying depending on the weather, according to the following table.*

LIGHTNING SUMMONING DIFFICULTY

Weather	DT
Clear and dry	12
Cloudy	9
Rain or storm	6

LIGHTNING SUMMONING (TOLERATED CULTS)

Discipline. Lightning Summoning (variable DT)
Duration. Brief (3 tempus)
Procedure. The following rules apply to any of the rituals described below. The character focuses for three tempus on the bolt they wish to summon and must not be disturbed, otherwise the ritual must be started again. On the third tempus, the Custos rolls **De Magia** (the DT depends on the weather, see table above). Outdoors, a character can summon lightning bolts of all types, while in windowless rooms only the wet kind is possible.
Response. If the ritual is successful, the desired bolt manifests according to the following description. Then, the character cannot attempt new summonings for the rest of the day.

- **Dry bolt.** The target is struck by a heat wave. If an item, it melts or is set on fire, depending on the material it is made of. Glass and metals melt, while paper and wood are set ablaze. If the target is a creature, it suffers 12 Dice Points of damage for every Degree of Success of the officiant (ignoring armor). The target can roll **Coordinatio** to halve that damage (rounding up), negating it completely with a III Degree of Success.
- **Wet bolt.** The target is struck by a cloud of boiling steam born of the bolt. If it is an item, it suffers from exposure to extreme heat for a few seconds: metal glows red but does not melt, and wood and paper char and blacken. If the target is a creature, they suffer 12 Dice Points of damage for every Degree of Success of the officiant (ignoring armor). The target can roll **Vigor** to halve the damage (rounding up), negating it completely with a III Degree of Success.
- **Clear bolt.** The target is struck by a bolt of lightning, but does not seem to suffer any effect other than a mild concussion unless they are inside a metal vessel. If the target is a container, it is unharmed, but if made of metal its contents melt or dissolve, depending on their material. If the target is a creature, it suffers 8 Dice Points of damage for every Degree of Success of the officiant (ignoring armor; if made of metal, double the damage). This damage cannot be reduced.

If the De Magia roll fails by 3 points or less, no lightning bolt is called. If it fails by 4 points or more, the bolt strikes the officiant instead of its intended target.

Cost of learning. 120 Curriculum Points

OTHER RITUALS OF THE OFFICIAL CULT

INCUBATIO FAUNI

Discipline. Interpretation of Dreams (DT 6)
Cost. 9 Pietas
Duration. Average (an hour)
Procedure. This Divination induces a prophetic dream. It differs from normal *Somnii Interpretatio* (see Core Rulebook) because it is a request for the god Faunus to send a dream to answer a question.
To do so, the officiant must sleep in a grove after offering a sacrifice to Faunus, the god entering their mind as they sleep and giving a response as detailed as the original question was. As such, one can receive unusually accurate answers.
Response. The higher the Degree of Success, the more detailed and easier to understand the response.
Cost of learning. 60 Curriculum Points

INCUBATIO FAUNI

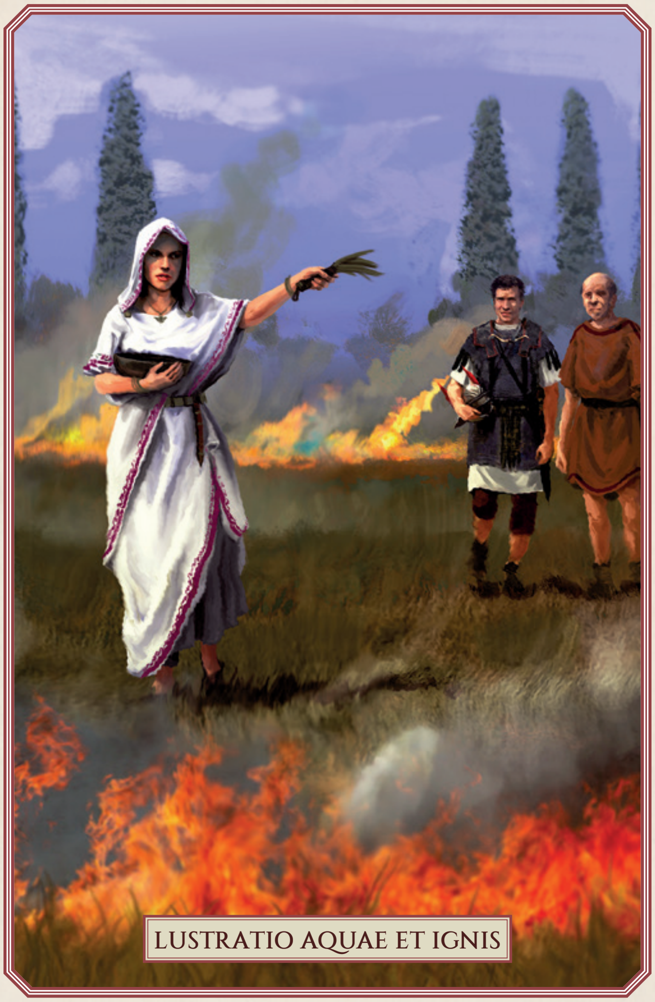
***Note.** This ritual is a dangerous procedure. Even if the god is well-disposed towards the petitioner, the power surrounding him as a manifestation of nature is still overwhelming, as the frail human mind cannot comprehend, let alone contain, the boundless essence of the god, even if divine Faunus means no harm to them. In game terms, if the De Magia roll fails, the petitioner may, failing a **Ratio** roll (DT 6), lose their sanity or remain "trapped" in the dream. In either case, the player loses control of their character until they receive adequate care (at the discretion of the Demiurge).*

LUSTRATIO AQUAE ET IGNIS

Discipline. Favor of the Gods (DT 6)
Cost. 9 Pietas
Duration. Long (a few hours)
Procedure. The normal lustratio is a cleansing rite, commonly performed by spraying ceremonial water on people, objects, or places to break hexes, curses, and other unholy phenomena. The lustratio of water and fire is much rarer, performed only during the celebration of the god Pales, for the use of two opposing forces indispensable to life, water and fire, is a key element in the duality of this god. It is possible to perform it on other occasions, too, as long as Pales is invoked in addition to any other deity and the ancient procedure is followed with care. To perform the rite, do as follows. First, surround the chosen area with a thin line of a dust made of olive branches, laurel, local herbs, and sulfur. Then, set this "border" on fire while spraying the herds and fields with purified water. Scatter the ashes to the wind or by the feet of the animals (or those of the participants), reciting a special prayer to Pales while looking eastward.
Response. This rite helps in placating inadvertently insulted woodland or water spirits and protects the fields for the coming year. It can also prove useful for:

- Reconsecrating an area where was committed sacrilege or a deed against the Pax Deorum (if one or more gods were hostile or indifferent, this ritual restores their favor);
- Cleansing a place where lived a demon or other evil creature, preventing them from returning (for a year, Demons and the Undead cannot manifest in that area);
- Eliminating forever the influence of an evil god from a place consecrated to them (avoiding the loss of Pietas or the *Cursed* condition inflicted by crossing it);
- Bolstering the thresholds (increasing by 1 level the difficulty of any roll to cross them): some military commanders from Latium still to this day have the rite performed along the walls of their castra anywhere they build them.

Cost of learning. 60 Curriculum Points


LUSTRATIO AQUAE ET IGNIS

NEW INDIGITAMENTA

These Indigitamenta are related to deities who, though rightfully part of the Di Indigetes, were almost forgotten by the people of the Empire. They come from the most archaic history of Rome and are strongly tied to the lands of Italia, especially ancient Latium. They follow the usual rules for the Indigitamenta of the Di Indigetes (see Core Rulebook).

DIANA LUCINA (SHE WHO LEADS TO THE LIGHT)

In ancient Latium, the goddess Diana was worshiped as she who tore through darkness, whether actual or figurative, leading to the light.
Virtus. Sensibilitas
Cost. 3 Pietas
Requirements. Immediately after the invoker has made any roll.
Effect. The senses of the invoker sharpen and their intellect grows, adding the result of the Sensibilitas roll to the previous one.

FERONIA REGINA LIBERTATIS (QUEEN OF FREEDOM)

Feronia is a wild goddess who does not take kindly to chains and constrictions. Whoever invokes her help can break free of any bond.

Virtus. Auctoritas
Cost. 3 Pietas
Requirements. None
Effect. For each Degree of Success on the roll, the invoker can free a creature (including themselves) from a physical bond of any kind (ropes, chains, etc.), or from the Hold magic powers (see page 192) Paralysis and Petrification. In addition, the targets automatically succeed in any roll against these magic powers until the following dawn or sundown (choice of the invoker).

OPS MATER ABUNDANTIAE (MOTHER OF ABUNDANCE)

Ops is often invoked as Domina Abundantia, Lady of Wealth. Whoever invokes her name for this reason gains the boons granted by good food, even if they have not eaten.

Virtus. Vigor
Cost. 3 Pietas
Requirements. None
Effect. For 3 days per Degree of Success on the roll, the invoker does not require sustenance, ignores the effects of the *Debilitated* condition (even if inflicted by other conditions), and always enjoys the benefits of a comfortable rest.

Alternatively, Ops can be invoked as **Ops Mater Turrita**, Mistress of Fortifications and Walls Protecting Civilization. In that case, the effects are applied to a place of the invoker's choice (and all inside that place) instead of them.

PALES UNUS ET MULTIPLEX (ONE AND MANIFOLD)

Pales' nature is unknown, their name both masculine and feminine, singular and plural. By invoking their name, one can tap into this manifold nature, conjuring many illusory copies of oneself.

Virtus. Ingenium
Cost. 3 Pietas
Requirements. None
Effect. The invoker summons one image of themselves for each Degree of Success on the roll. The copies are intangible and perfectly identical to the invoker, impossible to tell from the original other than by verifying their lack of solidity. An illusory image can move and speak as the invoker wishes within a short distance of them, can engage or be engaged in combat, and uses the same De Bello (or De Corpore) scores of the invoker (any Parry or Combat Talent are not applied), but cannot deal damage and does not count for number superiority. If hit, even without suffering damage, the copy dissolves.

The illusory images dissolve after a few minutes, or at the end of combat.

SILVANUS FINIUM TUTOR (WARDEN OF BORDERS)

In ancient times, Silvanus was considered the protector of borders, and shrines dedicated to him, occasionally even just a few roughly carved stakes, were placed to mark the end of a field and the beginning of the next one, or between pastures and wild forests. Silvanus ensures that the borders between the realm of humankind and nature are respected, that everything stays in balance, and that all the spheres (natural, human, divine) are in balance.

Virtus. Ratio
Cost. 3 Pietas
Requirements. None
Effect. The invoker traces an invisible border to protect a place (an encampment, a house, the entrance of a cave, etc.). For a number of hours equal to the Degree of Success on the roll, no creature can move through that threshold without the consent of the invoker.

VERTUMNUS DOMINUS MUTATIONIS (LORD OF CHANGE)

The Latin name of this ancient god features the root of the verb *vertere*, "to change", as well as "turn something back", as his is everything that changes, including both moving to something better as well as reverting to a previous state.

Virtus. Coordinatio
Cost. 3 Pietas
Requirements. None
Effect. The invoker takes the appearance of somebody else, as long as they have seen them at least once with their own eyes (portraits, as masterful as they may be, do not count), or of an animal (though not a sacred, monstrous, or fantastical one). If the chosen shape is that of an animal, refer to the rules reported in the description of the magic power Metamorphosis on Others (see page 192). The transformation lasts for a number of hours equal to the Degree of Success on the roll.

Alternatively, the Custos can use this invocation to revert the effects of the Metamorphosis and Metamorphosis on Others magic powers on a number of creatures equal to the Degree of Success on the roll.

NEW SPECIALITIES

ASTRONOMY (DE SCIENTIA).

This Specialty allows a character to identify the position of planets, stars and celestial constellations. This knowledge can be used to orient at night, predict eclipses and lunar cycles, calculate the position of the stars in the sky, draw up horoscopes. This Specialty lowers by 1 level the DT for divinations based on the Sideratio ritual.

MATHEMATICS (DE SCIENTIA).

It is the ability to calculate and solve problems related to arithmetics and geometry. The Custos can use it to estimate distances, areas and volumes; accurately verify commercial reports; solve number-based riddles. At the discretion of the Demiurge the Specialty can be used to support other scientific Specialties (eg Astronomy, Decipher, Architecture).

NEW EQUIPMENT

DISCI SOLARES (PORTABLE MIRRORS OF ARCHIMEDES)

The *disci solares,* "solar discs", (sing. *discus solaris*) are a smaller version of the great solar mirrors Archimedes mounted on the walls of Syracusae to set Roman ships on fire. These smaller versions are portable, and can be used by our troops anywhere, requiring only a simple tripod on any kind of terrain. Disci solares concentrate sunlight into a beam easily aimed at a small target.

A discus solaris is made of a series of well-polished metal blades that allow it to be opened and closed like a hand fan. When deployed and mounted on a foldable tripod, it forms a round mirror surface.

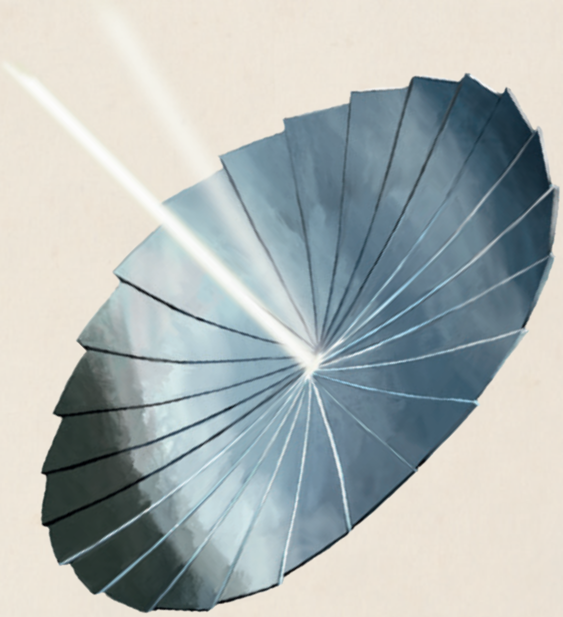
Disci solares are slightly concave at the center, to better convey heat, and coated in a secret reflective paint invented by Archimedes to increase their efficiency. Their beam is much stronger that anything a mundane mirror could ever conjure, and reaches further. They almost immediately deal damage.

Disci solares come in different diameters:

- **Discus bessalis.** Two-thirds of a foot wide, this is used as a signaling device (see sidebar). Given the special treatment of its reflective surface, it can be used at night, too, harnessing moonlight into a small, cold torch. It requires at least a full quarter moon, but, as compared to a torch, it does not require fuel and does not give off smoke or a combustion smell.
- **Discus pedalis.** One foot wide, it can be used by hand, although it requires being anchored somewhere. It produces a thin beam that can easily strike a target up to 90 feet away, piercing through materials such as paper and wood, or even breaking glass. In game terms, the discus pedalis inflicts 1d6 points of damage each tempus, reduced by armor.
- **Discus sesquipedalis.** One-and-one-half feet wide, it produces a strong beam that can reach up to 180 feet, piercing a thick wooden door or the side of a large wagon, damaging a component of a war machine, or setting flammable materials on fire. In game terms, the discus sesquipedalis inflicts 2d6 points damage each tempus within 90 feet, and 1d6 damage each tempus within 180 feet.
- **Discus bipedalis.** Two feet wide, it reaches 219 feet and is strong enough to pierce the roof of a building or the side of a small vessel. In game terms, the discus bipedalis inflicts 3d6 points of damage each tempus within 90 feet, 2d6 damage each tempus within 180 feet, and 1d6 damage each tempus within 210 feet.

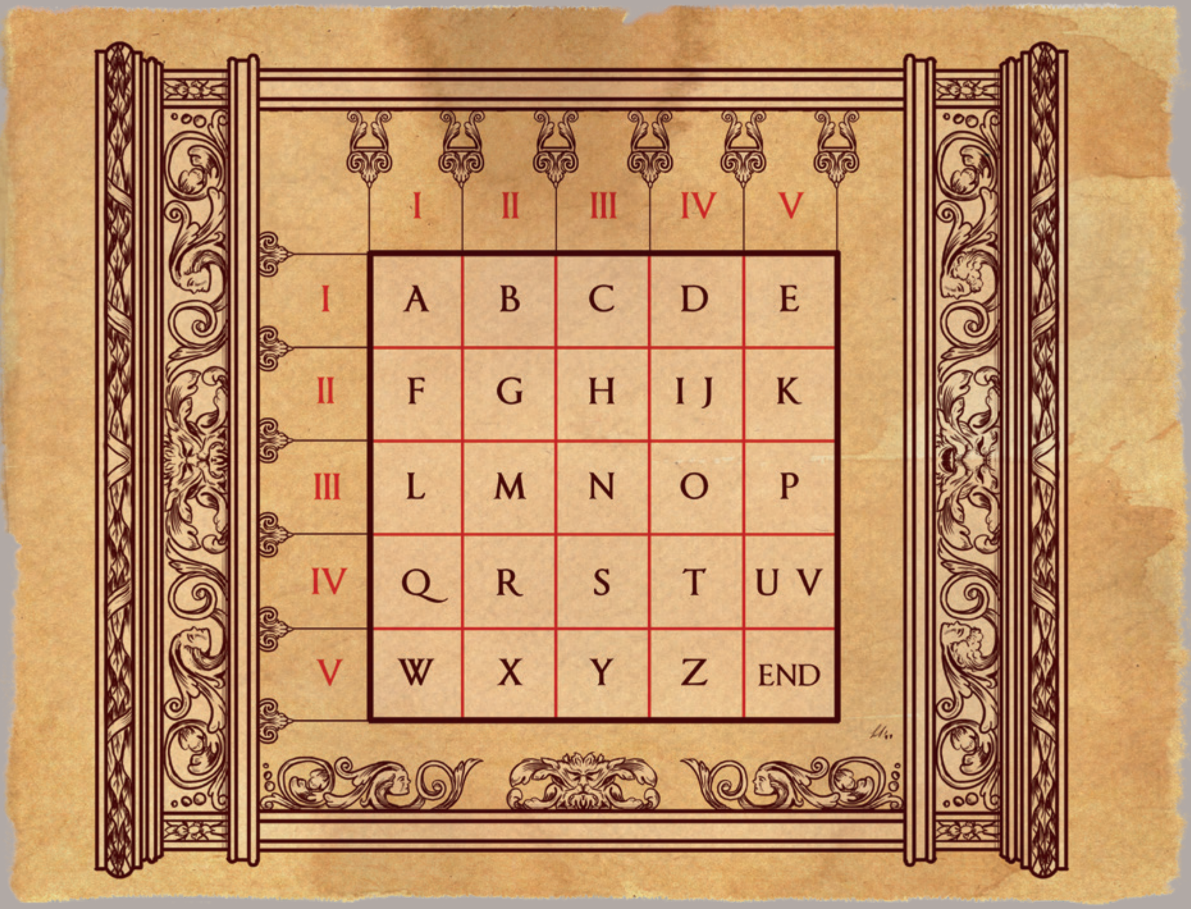
Because most disci solares require sunlight to function, it is not possible to harness their power at night unless otherwise specified.

They can be used in adverse weather because of their special coating, although at a reduced rate. When the sky is clouded, their damage is reduced by 1d6 (causing the discus pedalis to not inflict any damage), and by 2d6 with rain.



A CYPHER

To communicate with light signals over long distances, both parties must first agree on a reference system for the alphabet. The most common is that of the "square", where the alphabet is processed through the following grid:



	I	II	III	IV	V
I	A	B	C	D	E
II	F	G	H	I J	K
III	L	M	N	O	P
IV	Q	R	S	T	U V
V	W	X	Y	Z	END

Every letter is then identified by two numbers, a vertical and a horizontal. For example, the word "legio" is the following combination:

I/III – V/I – II/II – IV/II – IV/III

The signaler must uncover the mirror (or any other source of light) once and then three times to say that the first letter is the third letter from the top of column 1, and so on, for the rest of the word.

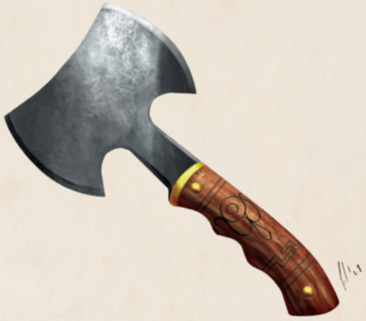
However, if the two parties prefer, they can agree on a different spread of the letters on the table, resulting in a harder to break cypher. The same system can be also used with sounds or beats on a drum: the text remains cyphered, but any secrecy is lost.

Note. *For ease of usage, it was decided to use all the letters of the modern alphabet, plus a sign for the end of the message. If the Demiurge wishes to adhere more to the Latin tradition, they can eliminate the "w" and the sign for the end of the message, rearranging the other letters accordingly.*

NEW WEAPONS

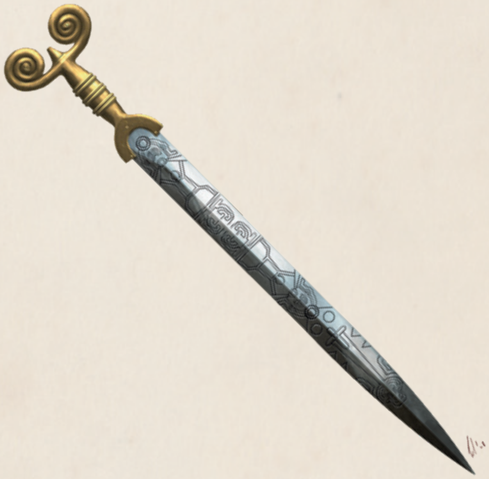
MAMERTINE AXE

This is a small, double-bitted axe developed and used by the Mamertine mercenaries, always at their belts. Every warrior decorates the handle and head to their liking, so they can recognize their own from any others.



SWORD OF THE CAMUNI

The swords of the Camuni are closer in size to a Gladius, though their unusual double spiral pommel makes them look somewhat "barbarous" for Roman taste. They are often decorated with precious stones, the most expensive of them embellished with amber. The blades are always covered in "glyphs", symbols made up of characters of the ancient language of the Camuni, although it is hard to tell if these symbols are just decorative or speak of the name of the first owner, the blacksmith who made it, or even of magical enchantments. No Camunus will ever sell one of these swords, nor is there a way to commission a new one, for they say nobody knows how to make them anymore.



Purely esthetic characteristics aside, one detail sets these swords apart from other expensive weapons: the blade is made of a shining metal, lighter than common iron and immune to rust, resulting in an unusually robust weapon for its weight. They were forged in ancient times to fight the monsters of the mountains where the Camuni live, the *Badalisci*, whose stone skin is said to be vulnerable only to these swords.

THE AXE OF THE MAMERTINI

This weapon has a great personal value for its owner, not only because they always carry it, but because each axe is unique to its owner. The Mamertini are given one when they turn sixteen and become adults, slightly earlier than what Roman laws prescribe. The axe will then be buried with the warrior as their only funereal ornament. The Mamertini use it in the same way other people use the dagger, not just in war but also as a tool for everyday life. Mamertine axes are also thrown, both in battle and as a sport.

If an axe is no longer serviceable, the warrior buries it in a small funeral ceremony, in which participate his companions and dearest friends, and even if he can have another made, it will not be the same. Losing one's axe is like losing a part of one's soul, and it is considered a terrible omen of imminent death.

However, in spite of this strong bond, it is not impossible for a foreigner to procure one of their axes, and they, the good mercenaries that they are, even sell them for a steep price! Mamertini mercenaries do not worry if their signature weapon is used by somebody other than them, saying that a weapon, as fine a piece as it may be, is no substitute for the skill foreigners lack. What they would never reveal willingly, however, are the secret techniques for using those axes, their special "martial art" that allows them to use the axe to its fullest, which requires many long years of training.

MELEE WEAPONS

Weapon	Damage/Difficulty	Encumbrance	Features
Mamertine Axe	5/7	2	Ancestral, Thrown
Sword of the Camuni	6/8	2	Ancestral

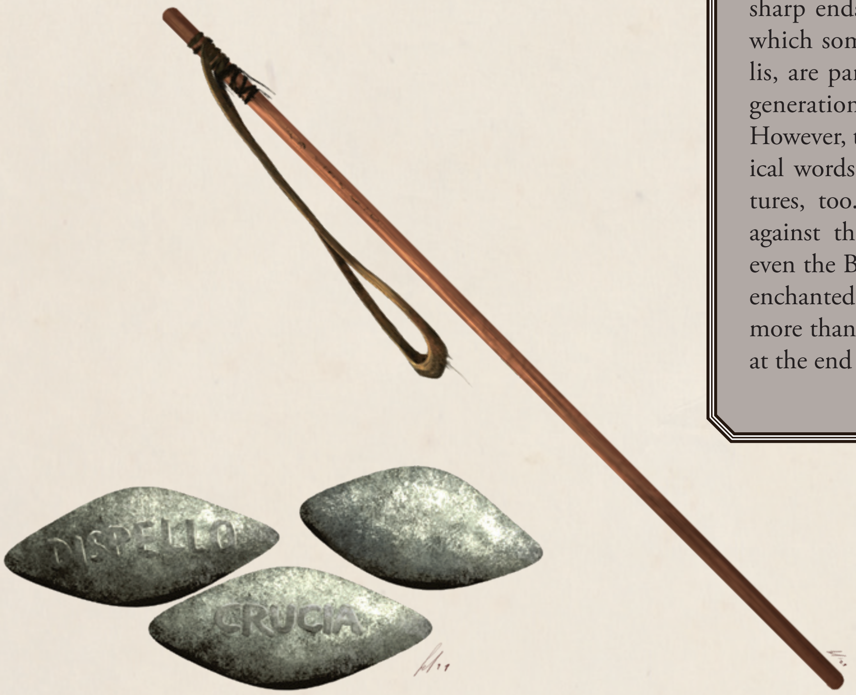
RANGED WEAPONS

Weapon	Damage/Difficulty	Encumbrance	Range	Features
Fustibalus	5	2	Long	Two-handed

FUSTIBALUS

This is a special sling fitted to a 5-foot-long staff with a thin strip of soft leather or hemp weave on one end, the *habena*, where the projectile goes. The warrior, holding onto the staff, rotates the sling and then lobs the projectile.

A fustibalus can also be used in melee (Damage 4, Encumbrance 2, Versatile).



THE *GLANDES ARGENTAE*

The *glandes argenteae* are projectiles used in both traditional Slings and *Fustibali*. A glans argentea has two sharp ends and is made of a silver and lead alloy, to which some supernatural creatures, like the Versipellis, are particularly vulnerable, as it inhibits their regeneration.

However, the glandes argentae can be carved with magical words to make them effective against other creatures, too. For example, some can bear inscriptions against the *Undead*, others against shapeshifters, or even the Berserkirs from the cold north. Usually, these enchanted projectiles are sold at a high price, and no more than 5 at a time (although they can be recovered at the end of combat).

NEW WEAPON PROPERTIES

ANCESTRAL

Only the makers of an Ancestral weapon know its secrets. The base values represent its usage without training, but it gains +2 Damage if the character wielding it has trained with it, expending an amount of De Bello Curriculum Points equal to its Difficulty rating. X 10 Depending on the circumstances, apply the following:

- If the character is taught by a master, training cost is reduced by 30 Curriculum Points.
- If the character is not *Expertus* in the use of the weapon (that is, their De Bello score is not equal or greater than twice the Difficulty of the weapon), training cost increases by 60 Curriculum Points.

NEW ARMOR

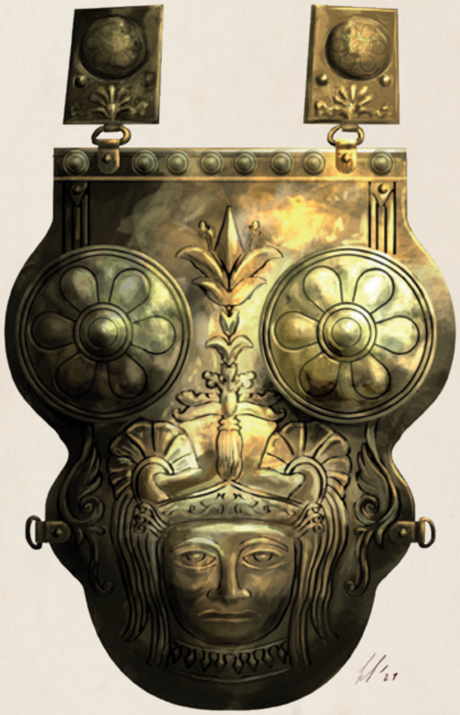
LORICA PECTORALIS

This armor is a derivation of the breastplate typical of the panoply of the ancient Samnites, sacrificing protection and reliability in favor of lesser encumbrance.

- A Lorica Pectoralis provides its Protection value as usual, but reduces damage only when the protection roll is greater than **half** of that value.

Example. A character wearing a Lorica Pectoralis Temperata (Protection 6) does not reduce damage if they roll 1, 2, or 3 on the protection roll, but reduces damage on a 4, 5, or 6.

Thanks to its light weight, the Lorica Pectoralis is easily hidden under heavy clothing, making it the preferred armor of agentes in rebus or anybody else who is tasked with undercover duties. Its secrecy makes it indispensable for the protection of the Emperor, too, when wearing armor would be considered disrespectful, such as attending religious ceremonies, court meetings, receiving notables, or attending the circus or the amphitheater. On those occasions, the Emperor wears under his august purple tunic a most rare Lorica Pectoralis, developed by the Pythagoreans of Kroton, with Protection 12 and Encumbrance 4. Only two examples of this Lorica Pectoralis are known, with the other one being for the Emperor's firstborn.



ARMOR

Armor	Protection/Encumbrance
Lorica Pectoralis Simplex	4/3*
Lorica Pectoralis Temperata	6/4*
Lorica Pectoralis Duplex	8/5*
Lorica Pectoralis Triplex	10/6*

** See description*

NEW MAGIC ITEMS

ALEA CAESARIS
(THE DIE OF CAESAR)

Alea iacta est: This fateful sentence of Julius Caesar's became the definition of making an important decision without turning back. The die is cast, and like in a game of chance, one must bear the responsibility for a gesture that may lead to great gain, as well as utmost ruin.

And yet maybe Caesar was not speaking figuratively. Some researchers have been claiming for some time there is a correlation between this sentence and the divination practice of hydromancy and its pegomancy variant (see page 166). This practice is performed by throwing objects into water and observing their reaction as they sink. In the past, it seems dice were used for this purpose, too.

Some, then, believe that Caesar cast into the waters of the Rubicon a special die, capable of yielding accurate predictions to those who know how to use it. Some even claim this item is the die with which King Atys of Lydia chose to send his own son, Tyrrhenus, to Italia to found the people we today call Etruscans. This die is said to bolster divination skills if used somewhere supernatural forces are stronger, and the magical threshold of the Rubicon may have given Caesar the perfect context to obtain the most accurate reading for that fateful moment.

It is not unusual, then, to meet researchers on the banks of the Rubicon as they search where it is said the famed leader camped as he waited for word from the Senate, claiming Caesar's Die is still there.

- For a prediction, one must ask a question, roll the Die in the water, and observe its fall. The Die must, however, be used somewhere thriving with supernatural forces, a body of water connected to otherworldly creatures, or, as Caesar did, a consecrated river. The result is the same as that of a successful *Pegomancy* ritual (see page 167).
- Alternatively, a Custos who knows the *Pegomancy* ritual can use Caesar's Die by performing a *Pegomancy* ritual with it. They receive information and inspiration for their current adventure, and their player rolls 1d6, adding the result to any roll for anything related to the ritual.

THE GOLDEN BOUGHS

In the fortunate land of Italia exist two magical branches that allow interacting with the realm of the dead. They are hidden in the hearts of two sacred groves, one on the banks of Lacus Nemorensis, dear to the goddess Diana, in Latium, and the other around Lacus Avernus in Campania, one of the entrances of the Underworld. Such positions are not a quirk of Fate, for the former is under the protection of the priest of the goddess Diana, while the latter is protected by the priestess of Apollo. Because the two gods are twins, it stands to reason that the twin magical branches are entrusted to the custody of their priests.

The two Boughs are, however, still somewhat different. The Avernalis grants prophecies from the dead, while the Nemorensis allows asking prophecies directly from Proserpina.

Both grant a great privilege, for divine Proserpina sees the future and grants light and understandable responses, while the dead, being free of human constrictions, see the future more clearly than living prophets, condemned to give obscure prophecies.

RAMUS AUREUS NEMORENSIS (THE GOLDEN BOUGH OF LACUS NEMORENSIS)

This golden branch grows in normal arbutus shrubs, and picking it requires a successful **De Natura** roll (DT 15). If one wishes to interrogate divine Proserpina on human or divine affairs, they must bring it to her.

- The Golden Bough of Lacus Nemorensis grants a similar effect to the *Oraculum* ritual, but without costing Pietas and with a III Degree of Success. Proserpina speaks through the bearer of the branch and provides extremely detailed answers to three questions.

At the end of the effect, the Bough breaks, becoming unusable. To find another, the group must wait three days.

RAMUS AUREUS AVERNALIS (THE GOLDEN BOUGH OF LACUS AVERNUS)

Hidden in a laurel bush, the Golden Bough has powerful magical properties.

The Ramus Aureus Avernalis, unlike the Nemorensis, has a semblance of a will of its own, and agrees to be picked only by the chosen of Fate. Once picked, it grants its bearer the privilege to awake the shadows of the dead from their slumber and ask them questions about the future or the past, to which they provide clear answers. Some even claim they would agree to let the mortals pass in and out of the Underworld. Aeneas is said to have done so, venturing into the Underworld protected by the the magic Bough to ask prophecies of his dead father, Anchises.

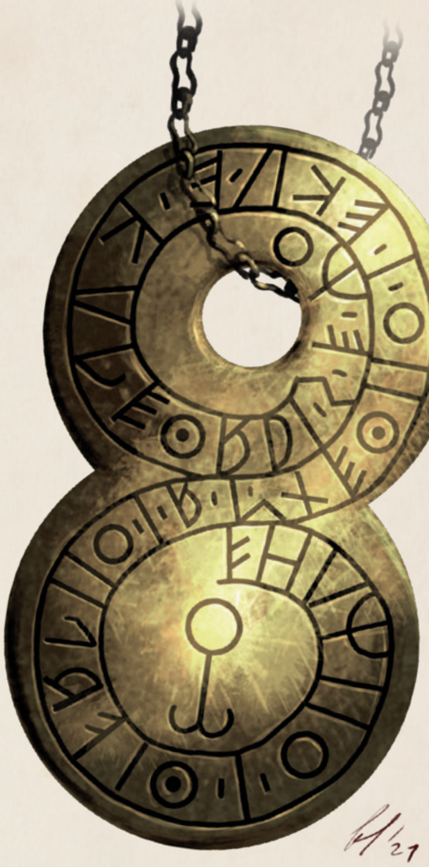
- The first effect is summoning a dead person, whose spirit is called to the world of the living to answer questions about their past or anything they may have learned in the Afterlife. The bearer of the Bough must be, at sundown, somewhere they can have a direct communication with the Underworld, such as a graveyard or a deep cave, then dig a pit, pour in it the blood of sacrificial animals, and recite the proper necromantic formulas. The summoned soul answers three questions, usually with one sentence or word each. The circumstances of their death are the ones they remember the best, their memories growing more incoherent the further from that moment.
- The second effect, much more dangerous, allows physically descending into the world of the dead. The bearer of the Bough and their companions must gather at an entrance to the realm of the dead, such as Lacus Avernus, offer the proper sacrifices to the gods below, and recite the forbidden formulas. The Bough allows this descent, but should it break while its bearer and their companions are in the realm of the dead, they are bound to remain there forever. After the invocation, the bearer and their companions disappear among the shadows and leave the world of the living to venture into that of the dead. The specific consequences of the journey are left to the Demiurge, but the Underworld does not have definite features; it is a non-place, shapeless, colorless, and plunged into darkness, from which occasionally emerge spectral figures. If the bearer is looking for one spirit in particular, they manifest first, but at the discretion of the Demiurge they may not be alone. The actions of the characters should be limited to interacting with the souls of the deceased, from whom it is possible to receive information, advice, and warnings about the present adventure. However, on one hand the dead may be ill-disposed towards the characters, and on the other, even if they are willing to help the group, they are not the only inhabitants of the Underworld… Should the characters tarry, lose their way, or attract unwanted attention, the group may very well be doomed.

Whatever the effect, the Bough disappears after serving its purpose, and it is up to Fate to decide if it is to ever be found again.

THE KEY OF REITIA

The Veneti call by this name the symbols in the shape of a coiling snake biting its tongue, symbols of great power, often present on amulets worn or hung in households. On the body of the snake were inscribed words in the Venetic alphabet invoking the power of the goddess, each made for an individual person and an individual goal. According to what is known, there were no two identical amulets, nor any of generic use, each being a key that could open only one lock.

- To identify a Key of Reitia and its effect, one must pass a **De Magia** or **De Scientia** roll (DT 9). There are many types of keys, each tied to a specific Specialty (see Core Rulebook). Wearing the amulet allows once per day rolling again the corresponding Peritia, if related to the Specialty to which the key is bound (the character must keep the second result, even if worse than the first).



MAGICAL AMBER OF THE PADUS

The Amber of the Padus comes in four variants: Yellow, like that from the cold North, Red, Dark, and Black. Each kind has different properties, although all protect from fire and heat or can harness flame in some form.
Each kind of Amber is either worn as an amulet or used as an ingredient to obtain other magical effects:

- **Amulet.** An amulet must not be smaller than a walnut, formed of either numerous pieces of the same color or one chunk, and worn on one's person. Amulets, jewels, or pendants can be composed of various pieces of Amber to obtain a protective object. To be effective, however, the pieces must be of the same color.
- **Magical ingredient.** The size of the chunk depends on its use (see below). Once used, however, it is consumed, and to obtain a new effect another piece is required.

YELLOW

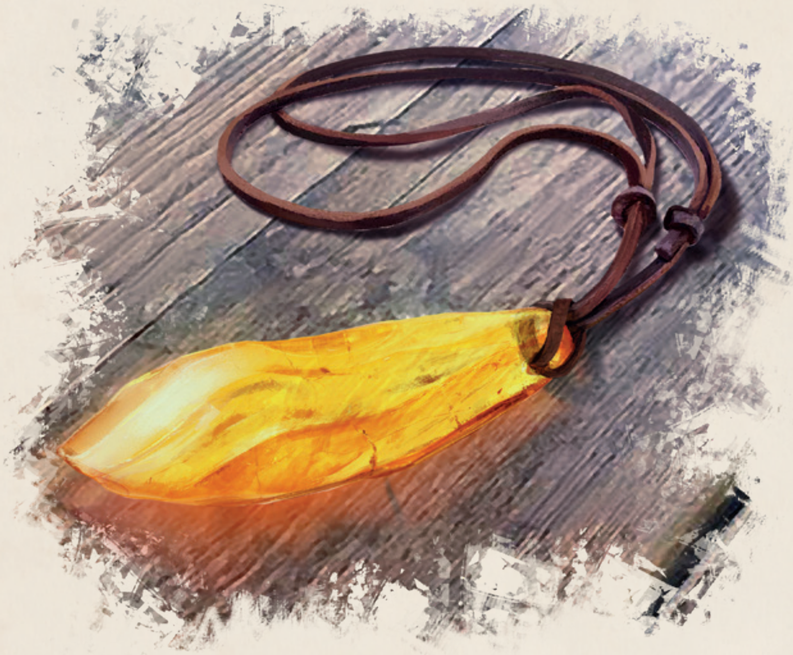
This Amber variety protects from fire in the broadest sense, both natural and magical.

- **Amulet.** The wearer is protected from damage and heat from flames of all kinds, including magically produced fire (for example, from the Fiery Breath magic power of some fantastical creatures). Once it has absorbed a total of 20 points of damage, the piece of Amber is completely pulverized and blackened, and can no longer be used, even as a magical ingredient. Some particularly large pieces of Amber can offer protection to buildings, or sections of them, as well, and can absorb a greater amount of damage.
- **Magical ingredient.** The powder obtained from crushed Amber is a medicine that heals all burns. Half a teaspoon mixed with a cup of a greasy substance produces an ointment which can be applied to the burn. Six cups of ointment, and consequently three teaspoons of Amber powder, are needed to treat the whole body of a badly burned person. In game terms, a character who has suffered wounds from fire can check the *Treated* box without rolling for First Aid, recovering 2d6 Hit Points instantly.

RED

This Amber variety protects one from fever and lowers body temperature.

- **Amulet.** Its main effect is to prevent fever, but it can also help in treating it. Traditionally a Red Amber amulet was a precious family heirloom, the only remedy against common diseases, from winter fevers to infections. However, this effect could prove counterproductive if its wearer is careless. Fever drops, but whatever illness the person is suffering from is not cured. Even if someone under the effect of Red Amber feels normal and believes themselves to be cured, they may not realize their condition may be growing worse until they lose their senses, or even die. In game terms, the amulet allows ignoring the *Fatigued* condition when resulting from the *Sick* condition.



- **Magical ingredient.** Finely ground and drunk with water or wine, Red Amber dust is a pharmakon useful in treating fever and inflammation. Even if it does not heal all illnesses, it is still of help in reducing their intensity. The dose for an adult is half a small spoon of Amber dust in a glass of water, and its effect lasts four hours. In game terms, the pharmakon allows a *Sick* character to suffer only the effects of the *Debilitated* condition (ignoring the *Fatigued* condition and the effects of loss of Hit Points from being *Sick*), although the character must still pass the Vigor roll to be healed of the illness.

DARK

This Amber variety protects from lightning bolts, and in ancient times was often associated with the *Ars Fulguratoria* (see page 131).

- **Amulet.** It prevents its wearer from being struck by lightning bolts, both natural and summoned. When the bolt strikes the amulet, it absorbs and disperses its power, with the wearer coming to no harm. However, the Amber piece is blackened and turns into unusable dust, no matter how much damage it absorbed, and cannot be used as a magical ingredient.

- **Magical ingredient.** Ground to dust and mixed in equal parts with oak ash (sacred to Jupiter, Lord of Lightning), it is used in warding an area from lightning bolts, mundane and magical alike, through a thin cordon of dust at least an inch wide around a person or object. Dark Amber is rare, so it is hard to find enough to cover larger areas, and adding extra oak ash to compensate the lack of Amber is not regarded as a wise choice. Too thin cordons or those with too little Amber make for a weak threshold, which may not contain the strength of a bolt.

BLACK

The rarest variety, it can be confused with obsidian or black glass, but if observed against light, one can see a reddish glow inside it. Unmistakably Padus Black Amber, it is famous for sparking long gouts of flame.

- **Amulet.** A character wearing an amulet of Black Amber can attempt to strike somebody in front of them with a sudden burst of flame by touching the amulet with a burning twig or a candle. The range of the flame is 3 feet, and it inflicts 3d6 points of damage. The flame disappears immediately, and after three activations the Amber is consumed, leaving only a charred void in its socket.

- **Magical ingredient.** If placed in the fire of a large torch, it emits a three-foot-long straight flaming beam that, if used with skill, may be employed as a flaming sword of sorts (Encumbrance 2, Difficulty 6, Damage 18, Versatile) that lasts for 3 tempus of combat. Throwing it into a bonfire or a ritual fire causes it to burst into a 20-foot flame, as straight as the column of a temple, visible at night like the flame of a lighthouse, which disappears after a few minutes. If contacted, it inflicts 3d6 points of damage.

MAGICAL WAND OF CIRCE

The main use of Circe's Wand seems to be transmutation, for she was known to turn anybody who misbehaved on her island into docile animals. The isle of Circe, as the ancient authors say, had numerous ferocious beasts, there entirely docile, that ate from the hands of the goddess and peacefully played in her grounds.

Because none was never able to observe this magical tool, we cannot know whether it can be used exclusively by its divine owner and likely maker, or it can be used by mortal hands as well. On the other hand, this is just vain speculation, for taking the Wand from the hands of Circe is almost impossible. Circe's Wand is roughly two-and-a-half feet long, thicker by the handle and tapering to the end.

It is made of an unknown wood, the majority of scholars believing it is a branch of myrtle deprived of its leaves and bark, dried and polished. It does not bear any decoration, and its surface is so smooth and shining it seems made of burnished metal.

- The wand grants two powers, identical to the magic powers of the same names: **Metamorphosis on Others** (see page 192) and **Enchantment**. Both powers have a force of 2d12, affect up to 6 creatures at the same time, and can be used only once per day, as the energies of the Wand replenish at nighttime.

MOLY

This mysterious herb is called *moly* in Greek, and more rarely *immolum* in Latin, its only description being from a Greek text. Homer says in the Odyssey (Book X, vv. 290-306) that Ulysses is warned by Mercury when landing on the island of Circe:

> *"Circe shall make a potion for you, magical ingredients*
> *in your food*
> *but not even that will charm you: prevent it*
> *shall the benign pharmakon I shall give you."*

Then it is Ulysses himself who gives a detailed description:

> *"So Mercury handed me the pharmakon*
> *wrenched off the earth, and showed me its nature.*
> *Moly they call it and for mortals is hard to grasp:*
> *the gods however all can."*

Therefore, the only certain information about this herb is that its root is black, its flower white, and it is hard to pick from the earth, woefully little to identify it with certainty.
Expert herbalist Dioscorides, who lived at the court of Emperor Nero, claimed to have identified it as the Indian variety of *ruta*. He imported a few of these plants, planted them in the gardens of the Domus Aurea, Nero's magnificent palace, and ran numerous experiments, encouraged by the Emperor himself. The scrolls containing his observations, however, are now lost. Unfortunately, after the death of Nero, his palace was destroyed and the surroundings built anew. As far as we know, none of those plants survived.

- *Moly* allows its consumer to become immune to metamorphosis, both as the effect of the magic power by the same name and as a consequence of curses and supernatural illnesses (such as the Disease of the Versipellis or Vampire Contagion, see Core Rulebook). A dose lasts for a day. Moly is so powerful that it can be ingested even after the metamorphosis has taken effect, entirely and permanently canceling its effects.

TIBIAE FAUNI
(THE FLUTE OF FAUNUS)

The Tibiae Fauni looks like a simple twin-reed flute with regularly spaced holes, held together by a vegetation cord wrapped close to the mouthpiece. It is roughly a foot long, and the left reed is around three fingers shorter than the other.
The Flute produces eight "magical" melodies, inducing eight different emotions. To use it, one must either be able to play a mundane flute or pass a **De Societate** roll (DT 6). This roll has no magical effect, but rather determines whether the player can conjure the Flute's magics. Though enchanted, the item is still a musical instrument and requires skill, otherwise it has no effect.

If the initial roll is successful, the character can play the Flute to harness its power over anything capable of hearing the melody (including the player, if they so wish). The player must pass a **De Magia** roll (DT 9) and then choose an effect from the following table. If they fail the roll, the effect is determined by the Demiurge by rolling 1d8 and it affects the player, too (in that case, the player is considered to have rolled 0 on the resistance roll).

THE MOST ANCIENT OF ITALIC INSTRUMENTS

The most common Latin word for this simple instrument is *tibia*, the earliest flutes being made with long animal bones (*tibiae*, as it is). However, their irregular shape made for clumsy instruments, so carving wood pieces into more regular shapes became common, eventually leading to making them in metal, often elegant and decorated, famous for their clear and elegant sound. Tibiae are usually played in pairs, blowing into the mouthpiece of two different reeds, which is the reason why they are called *tibiae*, plural, instead of just *tibia*. Each of the two reeds emits sounds of different, but harmonic, tones, so even the simplest melody is made by weaving two complimentary sounds together. There are two common types of tibiae:

- ***Tibiae pares.*** The two reeds are of equal length, differing in the positioning of the modulating holes.
- ***Tibiae impares.*** The two reeds are of different lengths, one tuned to a higher tone than the other.

The reeds may be either cylindrical or conical, with the tapered end forming the mouthpiece.
In the many portrayals of the god Faunus, his Flute is represented in many different ways, for nobody has ever seen it. However, if those used by shepherds are any indication of the world of Faunus, then it stands to reason that the two reeds are made of natural material, instead of metal. They are most certainly two water reeds, probably tied together at the top with a vegetation cord. The numerous bogs along the course of the rivers of Latium grow with great patches of reeds, already hollow and easily turned into an actual musical instrument.

TIBIAE FAUNI

D8 Roll	Effect
1	**Apathy.** The listeners are sapped of all energy, unwilling to do even what they like the best or deem the most important, including eating and drinking. In game terms, this effect is considered an instance of the Hold magic power (the victim must *hear* the player) on page 192, which has no effect on objects. The effect lasts for 1d3 days, unless the player decides to stop it earlier (the player cannot if they are affected as well).
2	**Joy.** The listeners forget their worries, stop keeping track of time, and chit chat, often taking any chance to celebrate and drink. The effect is similar to *Apathy* (above), but those under it benefit from resting in a comfortable place (see page 68 of the Core Rulebook) for its duration.
3	**Friendship.** The listeners treat the player as an old friend or a brother in arms, and are generally well-disposed toward them. The listeners are considered to be under the effect of the Enchantment magic power (they must *hear* the player) with a force equal to the **De Magia** roll of the player with I Degree of Success. If the effect is obtained after a failed **De Magia** roll, the player and any others who can hear their melody are considered to be under the *Joy* effect (see above).
4	**Lust.** The listeners feel a strong erotic attraction towards the player, strong enough to upset them if they cannot satisfy it. It is considered a II Degree of Success *Friendship* (see above). If the effect is conjured after a failed **De Magia** roll, the player and any who can hear the melody engage in a frantic orgy, at the end of which they are all *Fatigued* and *Debilitated* for 1d3 days.
5	**Folly.** The listeners are caught by an irrational feeling towards the player of the Flute, willing to fight for them, even to betray their own companions and attack them. The effect is *Friendship* (see above), without limit to the Degree of Success. If conjured after a failed **De Magia** roll, the player and any who can hear the melody begin fighting with each other for 1d3 tempus, or until one or more of them is reduced to 0 Hit Points.
6	**Restlessness.** The listeners feel restless in a way they cannot explain, and are considered under the Terror magic power at I Degree of Success, with a force equal to the **De Magia** roll of the player.
7	**Fear.** The listeners are struck with fear and the irrational urge to leave and find shelter. The effect is the same as II Degree of Success *Restlessness*.
8	**Terror.** This is the primordial terror that the gods strike in mortals when appearing to them. No one can ever hope to keep a rational composure, screaming in fear and fleeing in random directions. The effect is the same as *Restlessness*, with no limit to the Degree of Success.

WINGS OF DAEDALUS

To use the Wings of Daedalus, one must first convince the priests of the Temple of Apollo to lend them, a feat of immense difficulty in and of itself, only possible after a successful **Auctoritas** or **De Societate** roll (DT 18; with a very good motivation or an Imperial mandate, the DT may be reduced to 9).

- The aspiring aeronaut must have the favor of Apollo to use the Wings, as all the Custodes, given their normal rites of consecration, normally do. However, in the case of the *indifference* or *hostility* of Apollo (and more generally, the gods of the Roman pantheon), the difficulty of all rolls while using them have their difficulty increased by 1 level.

The best way to take off with the Wings is jumping from a hill or similar height, passing a **Coordinatio** or **De Corpore** roll (DT 3). If the roll fails, needless to say, the aeronaut plummets to the ground and, most likely, their end. If an overhang or a hill is not available, one can take off with a running start of a few feet if there is a strong and favorable wind, like Daedalus and Icarus did to escape the Labyrinth. To take off in this manner, the character must pass a **De Corpore** or **Vigor** roll (DT 6).

It is key to wait for a strong, steady wind. Taking a running start when the wind is weak or inconstant, or to the side or back of the aeronaut, automatically causes the roll to fail. Characters successful in a **De Natura** or **De Scentia** roll (DT 6) can guess as much, while the others must deduce this on their own, and it is up to the Demiurge to decide the result of their actions.

ROAMING THE HEAVENS

Flying is not for everyone. During flight, daring aeronauts must face countless hazards, such as flocks of birds obscuring sight and altering the flight path, avian predator attacks that may wound them or damage their equipment, or storm clouds that may wet the feathers and cause them to lose lift. And, of course, never forget lightning bolts! Equally dangerous is ice, as well as, needless to say, excessive heat. In addition, airsickness may prevent the aeronaut from correctly using the Wings and confuse their sense of direction.

A character can fly at three altitudes: low (up to a few hundred feet from the ground), medium (up to three thousand feet from the ground), and high (beyond three thousand feet). Flying for too long at high altitude during the day causes the wax to melt and the aeronaut to fall. In hot regions, such as the African provinces, the East, as well as southern Italia, medium altitude is equally deadly.

To avoind losing their strength or being caught by airsickness, the character must pass a **Vigor** roll (DT 3 at low altitude, DT 6 at medium altitude, and DT 9 at high altitude) every hour. Aeronauts wearing heavy armor (Protection 5 or greater) are at a greater risk, increasing the difficulty of the roll by 1 level. If the character fails the roll, they lose a level of altitude, but if they were already flying at low altitude, they must roll **Coordinatio** (DT 6) to avoid plummeting to the ground and suffering 6d6 points of damage (they can still roll a last, desperate attempt to cushion the fall, passing a **De Corpore** roll against DT 9 to halve the damage). If falling into water or onto other softer surfaces, damage is reduced to 3d6 (halved on a successful **De Corpore** roll against DT 6).

When the aeronaut performs a maneuver, they must pass a **Coordinatio** or **De Corpore** roll at a Difficulty Threshold of 3 for simple maneuvers such as landing, changing altitude or direction, etc., or 6 (or more) for more complex or sudden maneuvers. If the roll fails, apply the complications above for failing the Vigor roll. It is needless to say that, while flying, an aeronaut cannot fight.

CRAFTING NEW WINGS

After carefully studying the Wings of Daedalus, one can attempt to build a new pair.

The character requires large amounts of the purest beeswax and plumes and feathers of large birds such as pelicans, vultures, albatross, and the like. They need to craft the frame correctly, otherwise they will not fly. This requires a **De Scientia** prolonged action (DT 12, 6 successes required, with each roll covering one work day; failing more than 3 rolls means the project must be started anew, requiring new materials). Once built, the wings must be consecrated to Apollo in a ritual that can be performed only by a character who knows any of his Indigitamenta. They must pass a **De Magia** roll (DT 12); on failure, the wings will never fly, and the object must be built anew.

Once the wings are completed, the Demiurge, in secret, rolls **Ingenium** (DT 9), the failure of which results in the wings being defective. If so, on any failure in a roll to take off or perform a maneuver, the wings break, and the aeronaut plummets to the ground. For a successful result, the aeronaut must earn the favor of Apollo, because the god may take copying them without paying proper homage as an insult.

Because artisan-made wings will never be as well-made as those of Daedalus, the difficulty of their taking off and flying rolls is increased by 1 level.

ETRUSCAN ARTIFACTS

The Etruscans made numerous magical items, many divination-related, that were lost throughout the centuries, but every now and then resurface. Ordered by Theodomirus, the Cohors Arcana has unleashed its members to search for these objects, scattered to the four corners of Italia. Some lie below the ground, maybe in the buried ruins of old towns, while many others are owned by wealthy private citizens or unknowing farmers.

The recovery of any of these powerful objects is a versatile hook for the Demiurge for a brief adventure, or an episode of a longer-spanning arc.

LIVER OF PLACENTIA

This is a bronze reproduction of a sheep's liver, divided into parts, upon which are carved the numerous regions of the sky and the names of the deities presiding over them. In truth, Etruria is full of these models, to practice and teach divination to new Haruspices. However, the most legendary of them seems to be missing.

The "Liver of Placentia" is so named because it was last sighted in the city of Placentia, a long time ago. The intricate history of this city is indicative of the difficulty in tracing the path of such a mythical item, as the city was initially under Ligurian influence, who lost it to the Etruscans, and then the Gauls. Eventually, in 535 AUC, we took it from the Gauls and called it Placentia.

The northern most of the training centers of the Haruspices, respected by all for their key role in ensuring the prosperity of the land, at some point in that scholarly hub appeared this model liver, said to have magical properties.

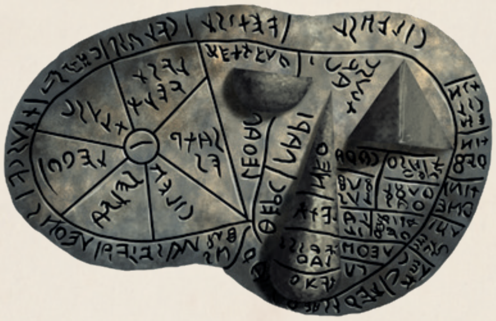
Like every other model of this kind, it is traced with the lines of the divine spheres of influence, according to the rules of the Etruscan templum. It differs from other models, in that this would have been covered in inscriptions accurately identifying not only the sixteen domains of the main gods, but also twenty-four more belonging to a range of now-forgotten Etruscan deities, for a total of forty regions, with as many inscriptions and other notes.

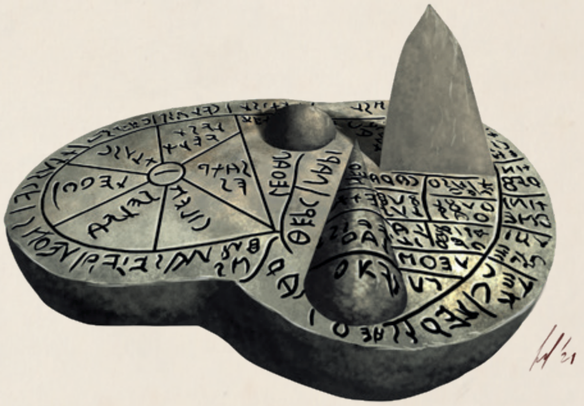
The precious artifact remained in Placentia even after Roman conquest, but at some point simply vanished, after being kept under lock for a long time. The time and nature of its disappearance is not known precisely, only that the crate in which it was kept was opened and found empty. Nobody could say how long had passed since the last time it had been checked, or who was the last one to see it.

The mystery has loomed for numerous centuries.

The Liver of Placentia is a powerful aid for Divination rituals:

- The characters who study this model must know the Etruscan language (see sidebar on page 188) and must expend a total of 30 De Magia Curriculum Points. From that moment onward, they reduce the difficulty of all *Haruspicina* rituals performed with sheep entrails by 1 level.





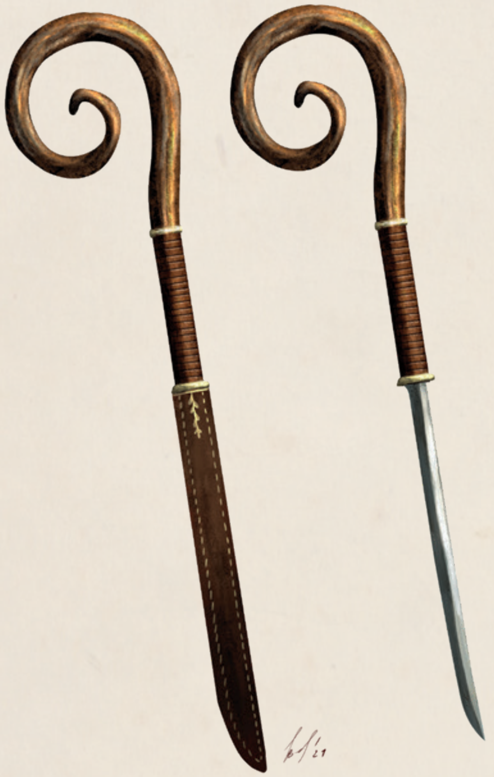
LITUUS OF TARKHNAS

The litui are short staves with the upper extremity curling into a spiral, typically wielded by the Augurs during their rituals (the Roman lituus is described in detail in the *Encyclopaedia Arcana*). However, the Lituus of Tarkhnas is not Roman. Etruscan litui are not staves, but sacrificial knives (in game terms, they are considered to have the profile of a Sica). On one side, they still have a curl, like the Roman one, but the other extremity is a sharp blade, usually covered by a leather sheath. They are only used for *Haruspicina* practices and to read the entrails of sacrificial animals.

The mythical Lituus of Tarkhnas bears the Etruscan name of the city of Tarquinia, for centuries the official headquarters of the Haruspices. In spite of its name, however, its location is still unknown.

Because Roman and Etruscan litui are rather different, it is possible for the uninitiated to the Etruscan traditions to see the Lituus of Tarkhnas and think it is just a normal knife. A character looking at the Lituus of Tarkhnas must first pass a **Scientia** roll (DT 6) to realize it is a ritual item, and then a **De Magia** roll (DT 9) to discern its magical nature.

- Whoever wields the mythical Lituus of Tarkhnas can perform *Haruspicina* rituals without spending Pietas (unless they fail the De Magia roll).



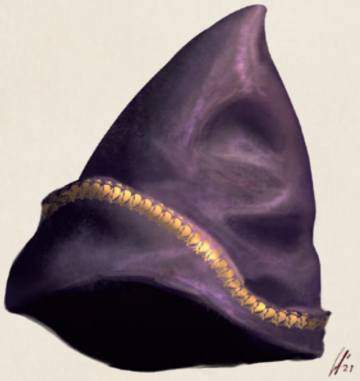
TÙTULUS OF TURMS

This ia a conical cap with a rolled edge made of heavy, grape-colored fabric.

For long centuries, the tùtulus was the traditional Etruscan headdress, worn by men, women, and even children. Often made in colorful and embroidered fabrics, it is still worn by Etruscan traditionalists. Wearing it in Rome is considered a laughable extravagance, and its use is banned at court and in the Senate.

The Tùtulus of Turms is related to its divine namesake, the Etruscan equivalent of Mercury, messenger of the gods, and favors communication:

- Whoever wears the Tùtulus of Turms can understand any language, both written and spoken, but can neither write nor speak it. However, nothing prevents writing in one's own language the contents of a document in another, once enough is gleaned.



TABLET OF PURSNA

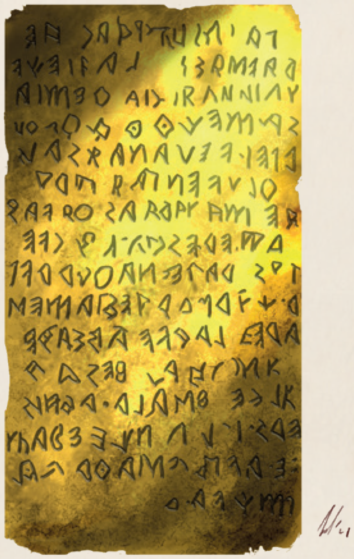
This item is a thin, golden sheet etched in the Etruscan language with the formula for summoning lightning bolts. It is named after the famous Etruscan King Porsenna (whose original Etruscan name was Pursna), who struck the monster looming over the city of Bolsena, after it devastated its countryside, with a bolt of lightning.

Lightning bolt summoning is a powerful magical art to call the power of the heavens onto one's target (see page 170). In the ancient Etruscan temples, it was practiced by a special order of priests, the Fulguratores. Today, that order still exists, but, according to its members, has forgotten the summoning technique and just observes bolts of lightning for divination purposes.

Finding the Tablet of Pursna would be an incredible boon for the Empire, for it is the only way to learn this arcane and powerful art. Naturally, should the Tablet fall into the wrong hands, it would pose a great danger to the stability of the Empire.

The main issue in using this magical item is its being written in the Etruscan alphabet and language:

- **Reading the Etruscan alphabet.** The Etruscan alphabet disappeared so long ago that now it can be easily confused with archaic Greek or other ancient Italic ones, like Venetic.
- **Understanding the Etruscan language.** Even if one were successful in decoding the Etruscan alphabet, one would still be faced with words long forgotten and utterly different from Latin.



LIBRI SIBYLLINI

In the year of the fifth Olympiad, to King Tarquinius the Proud came an old woman to sell him nine prophetic scrolls, the *Libri Sibyllini*, for three hundred golden coins, a price the king found outrageously excessive. The old woman then burned three books in front of his eyes and offered the remaining six for the same price. The king refused again, so three more were consigned to the flames. It was then that Tarquinius the Proud yielded, and bought the three remaining books at the initial price. He asked the old woman to rewrite the lost ones, but she refused, claiming they had to be inspired by the god Apollo. So, the precious remaining volumes were kept in the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, only to be destroyed by a fire in 670 AUC. The version circulating at the present day in Rome is a compendium, roughly a thousand lines long, that the Senate had collated from various sources all over the world and placed in the Temple of Apollo built by Augustus.

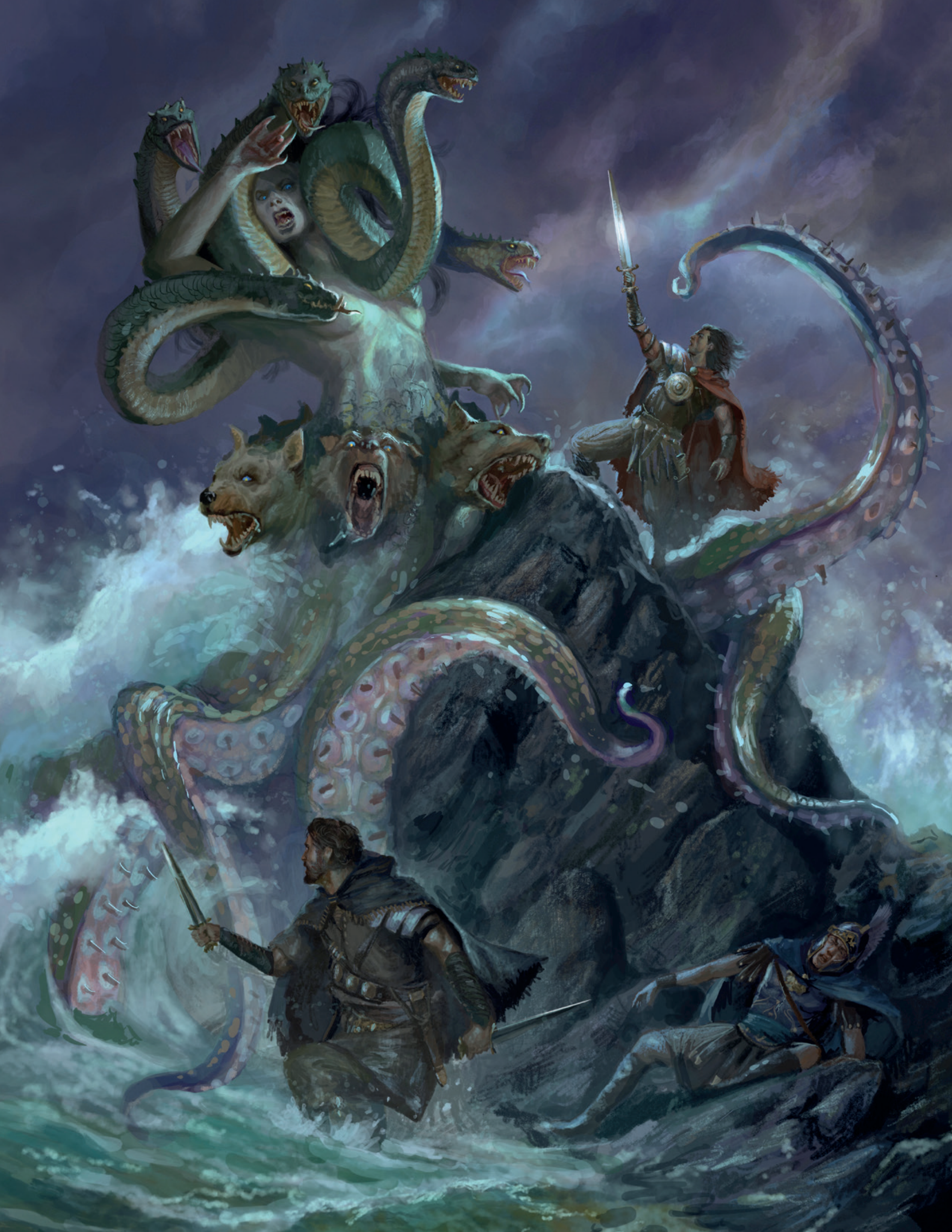
- Somewhere, anyway, still hide the nine original scrolls, copies of the ones offered by the old woman. These books contain prophecies, written in an obscure form of Etruscan, about the future of Rome and Italia, and although many have been already fulfilled in the last six centuries, others must still come to fruition.
- For all that is known about them, these scrolls may be hidden in the least likely of places, rather than the usual cases commonly used in libraries.

THE ETRUSCAN ALPHABET

To harness the power of artifacts inscribed in Etruscan, one must know their language and alphabet. Unfortunately, the world of the Cohors Arcana lost the Etruscan people many centuries ago, their language soon following suit. It is said that in the Tuscanian Appennines some still speak a dialect derived from the Etruscan language, although it is only spoken, and none may be capable of reading the ancient inscriptions.

When the Etruscans were a powerful people, holding many Italic regions, every area had its own local alphabet with unique variants, which Emperor Claudius, a scholar of Etruscan lore, seemingly collated into a unified version for the Augurs to use to access the ancient texts.

ETRUSCAN	LATIN	PRONOUNCED
𐌀	A	
𐌁	B	
𐌂	K	before E and I: KE and KI as in marKEt and KIss
𐌃	D	
𐌄	E	
𐌅	V	
𐌆	DS	as in "laDS"
𐌇	H	
𐌈	TH	as "t" with an added brief puff of air
𐌉	I	
𐌊	K	before A: KA as in "CAndle"
𐌋	L	
𐌌	M	
𐌍	N	
𐌐	P	
𐌑	SH	as in "fiSH"
𐌒	K	before U: KU as in COOked
𐌓	R	
𐌔	S	as in "Sand"
𐌕	T	
𐌖	U	semivowel, as in "West"
𐌗	S	as in "wiSdom"
𐌘	PH	F with an added brief puff of air
𐌙	KH	K with an added brief puff of air
𐌚	F	as in "Fun"



PART V

NEW MAGIC POWERS, FANTASTICAL CREATURES, AND NPCS

Italia is a land deeply steeped in magic, so the list of magical creatures in this section is unusually long. This section also has no shortage of creatures without supernatural characteristics, but specific to this province, as well as many new magic powers. Finally, this section includes the many non-player characters the group will meet in the ancient land of Italia.

NEW MAGIC POWERS

HOLD

Some creatures can immobilize on the spot people or things, preventing them from moving, usually by *touching* them.

If a character is targeted by this power, the effects are the same as those of the Paralysis magic power (described in the Core Rulebook) at I Degree of Success, preventing its target from moving their feet. The target can move every other part of their body, even fight, but at reduced efficacy.

If the power targets an inanimate object, it remais absolutely still. As an example, a vessel can still set its sails, but not even the most powerful storm will ever move it an inch from where it is. The caster must roll the force of the power against a difficulty depending on the size of the object (DT 3 for human sized objects, such as doors and furniture, DT 6 for wagons and boats, and 9 or more for larger objects).

LIGHTNING

Some creatures can conjure deadly lightning bolts from the sky and unleash them on one or more creatures. This power can be used up to 3 times a day, usually outdoors. It inflicts 3DV worth of damage the first time, 2DV the second, and 1DV the third. Equally, the first attack may target up to three targets near one another, the second two, and the third only one. In combat, the creature can summon lightning before or after the normal De Bello roll, as long as they are within Long distance.

Only if there is something under which to hide can the target roll **Coordinatio** (DT 9) to halve the damage, rounding up, negating it completely with a III Degree of Success. Shields and armor do not offer any protection. If the target is an inanimate object, if flammable it catches on fire or it is damaged to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the material it is made of (wood and fabrics are torn open and engulfed in flames; stones and bricks fracture; only metals remain relatively intact).

METAMORPHOSIS ON OTHERS

Some creatures can turn other beings (although only human beings and animals), instead of themselves, into the form of another creature, as well as revert transformed creatures back into their original forms. The transformation must be compatible with the mass of its target, so it is impossible, for example, to turn a man into a sparrow or a child into an elephant. Within their physical size, however, anything is possible, as long as the creature using this power chooses the form of an existing creature they have seen with their own eyes.

The target, then, rolls **Ratio** against the force of the Metamorphosis. If the target is not successful, then the effect of the Metamorphosis on Other power depends on the user's Degree of Success:

- *I Degree of Success:* The target is turned into the intended shape for 2d6 hours, replacing their own De Corpore score, special abilities, and natural Damage rating with those of the new form. Only the lowest De Bello score between the two is applied. If the new form cannot speak, so cannot the target, considering their De Societate score to be 0. If the new form is greatly different from the original, like a human being turning into an animal, the target loses all of their magic powers, if any, and their Combat Talent, if a Custos.
- *II Degree of Success:* The same as with I Degree of Success, but the target is transformed for 2d6 days.
- *II Degree of Success:* The same as with I Degree of Success, but the target is transformed permanently, or until the transformation is reversed.

FOG

Some creatures can emit smoke and fog to obscure vision and disorient their enemies, increasing by 1 level the difficulty of all non-opposed, vision-based rolls, including ranged attacks.

NEW NPCS

NON-COMBATANT NPCS

DECURIONES CIVITATIS

Average Value: DV5
1 die: De Bello, Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Corpore, De Scientia (Law), De Societate, Hit Points
3 dice: De Societate (Oratory, Politics), Ratio
Hit Points: 10
Weapons: None
Protections: None

The Decuriones Civitatis (sing. *Decurio Civitatis*) are the members of the town Senate, the Ordo Decurionum (litt. "Order of the Decurions"). Usually, there are a hundred of them, and to enter their order one must have a census of 100,000 sestertii.

DUOVIRI IURE DICUNTO

Average Value: DV8
1 die: De Bello, De Corpore, Hit Points, Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Scientia (Law), De Societate, Ratio
3 dice: De Societate (Oratory, Politics)
Hit Points: 8
Weapons: None
Protections: None

The Duoviri (sing. *Duovir*) are the two governors of a city, similar to the consuls of Rome. They lead the town assembly of the Decuriones, propose new laws to it, and act as judges in the tribunal. Every five years, the Duoviri revise the lists of the citizens, revoking citizenship to those of immoral conduct or not enough means. In the meantime, they can also admit new members into the Ordo Decurionum, if they meet the prerequisites.

AEDILES

Average Value: DV5
1 die: De Bello, Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Corpore, De Scientia (Architecture), De Societate, Hit Points
3 dice: De Societate (Bureaucracy, Politics), Ratio
Hit Points: 10
Weapons: None
Protections: None

The Aediles (sing. *Aedilis*) are the magistrates tasked with maintaining the roads, both private and private buildings, and temples. To them are also assigned the supervision of the markets, ensuring of water supplies, and the organizing of the town games.

QUAESTORES

Average Value: DV5
1 die: De Bello, Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Corpore, De Scientia (Economy), De Societate, Hit Points
3 dice: De Societate (Bureaucracy, Negotiation), Ratio
Hit Points: 10
Weapons: None
Protections: None

The Quaestores (sing. *Quaestor*) are the town's financial administrators, often corrupt and always rather wealthy

COMBATANT NPCS

HUNTERS OF LUCANIA

Average Value: DV6
1 die: De Magia (Superstitions), Ratio
2 dice: De Bello, De Corpore, De Natura, Hit Points, Sensibilitas
3 dice: De Bello (Missiles), De Natura (Hunting)
Hit Points: 12
Weapons: Spear (Damage 6), Fustibalus (Damage 5, ranged; wounds from its projectiles cannot be healed by the Regeneration magic power of the Versipellis and similar creatures)
Protections: Animal hides (Protection 3)

- *Special Abilities:* Acute Senses, Stealthy

These hunters are specialized in patrolling the territories where evil supernatural creatures hide, especially the many variety of unnatural Italic wolves. They roam in small, 15-20 individual bands, and during their operations they follow the orders of a commander, the one the group thinks to be the best suited for the job, although not really a distinct rank in the hierarchy. Command, then, changes hands often, even within the same group, resulting in an informal organization.

Although they traditionally roam the forests of central Italia, they are willing to move if the situation requires it, for they hold it to be their sacred duty to keep all lands free of the scourge of monsters. When they are somewhere they do not know well, these exceptional hunters thouroughly explore it to learn as much as they can about their new hunting grounds and their creatures, so they are rarely surprised. Some even claim they have a "sixth sense" that warns them of incoming danger, like the wolves they fight.

The Hunters are generally willing to serve the Imperial cause, and often cooperate with whoever, like them, fights for freeing innocents from monsters and evil creatures. For this purpose, they have developed a special weapon, a sling with a long handle, called the Fustibalus. This weapon is usually loaded with with special silver projectiles, the Glandes Argenteae (see page 177).

HIRPI SORANUS (“WOLVES OF SORANUS”)

Average Value: DV5
1 die: Ratio
2 dice: De Bello, De Corpore, De Natura
3 dice: De Magia (Soranus), Hit Points, Sensibilitas
Hit Points: 15
Weapons: Scramasax (Damage 5)
Protections: Wolf hides (Protection 3)

- *Special Abilities:* Pack Tactics
- *Magic Powers:* Fate Roll, Invulnerability (fire)

The leader is called ***Primus Hirpus*** *(DV6) and wears, in addition to the wolf hide, a necklace of wolf fangs as a sign of their rank.*

The priests of Soranus are called *Hirpi*, or wolves (sing. *Hirpus*), and are not a priestly order in the traditional sense. They are a brotherhood dedicated to war and plunder, dreaded for their quick and ferocious wolf pack tactics. Their actions, however, take on religious significance because Soranus sees them with favor, encouraging and appreciating chaos and devastation. During these raids, they wear a wolf hide, the animal sacred to Soranus, the only sign by which to recognize this particular priesthood, over their clothing. Their duties include the violent sacrifice of the poor souls they capture, preferably with torture, to appease their god’s, and their own, thirst for blood.
They are amoral beings, if not downright evil, so seeking an alliance with them is a great risk, although they do not seem opposed to the prospect.

It is said the Hirpi Soranus have magical powers, and can cross fire without burning or can turn into wolves. In truth, they are more akin to the Berserkirs of Germania, the wolf spirit possessing them to fight insensible to pain and wounds, even becoming invulnerable to fire. One of the tests to enter this fellowship requires aspirants to walk on a bed of burning coals during the “celebration of the black sun”. If they do not feel pain and do not suffer burns, then Soranus has taken hold of them, granting this magic power, implicitly accepting the new warrior into his service. Officially, however, an aspirant enters the pack of Soranus only when they receive the wolf hide the new warrior shall wear in every future raid.

The members of a band often compete amongst themselves both for the loot and to climb the hierarchy, vying for the rank of *Primus Hirpus*, the pack leader, and do not hesitate to betray and kill one another for more power in the group. The Primus Hirpus is chosen without bloodshed if a candidate shows the quality to lead the group to great plunder. Otherwise, the various candidates challenge one another to a duel to determine the strongest until it is their turn to be killed in the same way.

MERCENARI MAMERTINI

Average Value: DV5
1 die: Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Corpore, De Natura, Ratio
3 dice: De Bello, Hit Points
Hit Points: 15
Weapons: Mamertine Axe (Damage 7), Spear (Damage 6)
Protections: Lorica Hamata (Protection 5), Clipeus (Parry +2)

- *Special Abilities:* Formation – this ability is active if three or more Mamertine Mercenaries fight side-by-side under the direction of a Commander.

The **Commanders** *(DV6) are brave and extraordinary men, for one cannot achieve this vaunted position by political scheming. They wear a Lorica Plumata (Protection 6).*

The Mamertini are great fighters, for sale to the highest bidder, mercenaries who care not whose face is on the coin, only that it flows into their purses. However, although sellswords, the Mamertini are famous for their warrior ethos. Their bonds of brotherhood are legendary, and their faith to their Commanders death-defying. If their leader gives his word, then all his troops respect it to the letter, although they seem somewhat wary of fighting “good” people. Definitely, not the topic to mention when looking for their help.

Usually, the Mamertini fight in bands they call “legions”, formed by roughly 400 men split into five maniples, under the command of a leader. The legion takes a blood oath to its Commander and takes orders only from him, the one potential clients must speak with to hire their services. Because every Commander acts independently, it is theoretically possible for two bands of Mamertini to fight one another on the field of battle. However, because Mamertine Commanders keep secret contact with each other, this rarely happens, avoiding the spilling of fraternal blood. The Mamertine are willing to fight anywhere in the Empire, and even outside its sacred borders, as long as the pay is adequate.

PIRATES OF LIGURIA

Average Value: DV5
1 die: Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Bello, Hit Points, Ratio
3 dice: De Corpore, De Natura (Sailing), De Societate (Negotiation)
Hit Points: 10
Weapons: Scramasax (Damage 5), Sling (Damage 3)
Protections: None

The “pirates” of Liguria take great offense at this monicker, for they consider themselves traders forced to adapt to the hardships of life. Whenever possible, they say, they ply an honest trade; however, when it is not (according to their very personal definition of "not possible") they are "forced" to ply a dishonest one, such as smuggling. They always appreciate a customer who knows their way around haggling, and are willing to take on dangerous jobs if adequately compensated.

They operate in family-based structures, each owning a vessel of varying size with which it performs its trade. The ship belongs to the chieftain who, however, does not always lead it in person. Some chieftains prefer conducting their business on the ground, tasking their sons (or daughters) with leading the familiy ship, as all the Liguri are expert sailors and take to the sea in the middle of the night or in thick fog, circumstances ever useful in their traffics. Although "clan fleets" made up of many ships (up to forty or so) do exist, usually the Liguri work in small groups to attract less attention and split the loot into larger shares.

The Liguri deeper inland are "pirates" of another kind. They traffic through the mountains, moving men and wares unbeknownst to the authorities. Like their "cousins" on the coast, they can navigate the most hostile lands and can travel at night or in fog without losing their bearings. They, too, organize by families, each with its own territory of competence.

TOMB ROBBERS

Average Value: DV5
1 die: De Magia (Superstitions), Ratio
2 dice: De Bello, De Natura, De Societate (Deceit), Hit Points, Sensibilitas
3 dice: De Corpore
Hit Points: 10
Weapons: Scramasax (Damage 5), Sling (Damage 3)
Protections: None

Special Abilities: Stealthy

The **Leaders** *have DV6 and usually use an Arcus instead of a Sling.*

Skilled in reading every mound or barely perceptible deformation of tree and bush, they are capable of telling whether underground are tombs, monumental complexes, small secret chambers, and other burials of every kind, whether hidden away by time or by design. They can find the easiest point to breach the perimeter without causing damage, recover funeral ornaments and precious items, and it goes without question that they are also extremely adept in fencing their findings to the right buyer. But even among them, there are differences. Tomb robbers come in two kinds: the ones who actually loot tombs and sell their precious contents, and those who are in league with skilled counterfeiters, selling, for all intents and purposes, worthless fakes.

ETRUSCAN NPCS

FULGURATORES

Average Value: DV8
1 die: De Corpore, Hit Points, Ratio
2 dice: De Bello, De Magia
3 dice: De Magia (Lightning Summoning), Sensibilitas
Hit Points: 8
Weapons: Staff (Damage 4)
Protections: None

Magic Powers: Fate Roll, Lightning

The Fulguratores (sing. *Fulgurator*) are seers specialized in interpreting lightning bolts according to the *Ars Fulguratoria*, invented in Etruria, but for centuries now part of the rites of the Roman traditional cult. The best Fulguratores, however, usually are found in the Etruscan town of Volsinii.

A Fulgurator is capable of interpreting the signs of the gods with a special "language", tied to which region of the sky lightning is coming from and its shape or color. Such close proximity to the terrible power of lightning makes the Fulguratores an odd bunch, or so the priestly orders of Roman tradition murmur. Fulguratores are often grumpy, as if flowing with barely contained energy, with little patience for long-winded diplomatic orations, thinking fast and riding on the edge as they make their decisions. All Fulguratores are eagle-eyed observers, for lightning appears and is gone in the blink of an eye, forcing them to gather a great many clues in a short time. Because of this, some of them are also proficient fighters, capable of great speed and sudden bursts of action.

Only a handful, however, know how to summon lightning and wield it as a weapon or to communicate with their brethren. Their leaders keep this skill secret, preferring to let everybody believe the ancient art of lightning summoning was lost with the Roman conquest of Etruria.

HARUSPICES

Average Value: DV6
1 die: De Bello, De Corpore
2 dice: Hit Points, Ratio
3 dice: De Magia (Imperial Cults, Favor of the Gods), Sensibilitas
Hit Points: 12
Weapons: Etruscan Lituus (Damage 4)
Protections: None

Magic Powers: Fate Roll

The Haruspices (sing. *Haruspex*) are seers specialized in reading animal entrails, sheep livers in particular. Their assembly is made up of 60 priests whose leader, the High Haruspex Domitia Claudilla, lives in Tarquinia (see page 41), while the others live where they are sent. The readings of the Haruspices are always correct, and for this they are greatly sought-after in the service of high magistrates and governors in faraway provinces, as well as in the retinues of generals on missions for the Empire. Every Haruspex is trained in Tarquinia.

In Etruria, they enjoy great respect, and are treated with the same honors as the consuls, so it is not rare for the common folk to bow at their passing or ask for special blessings.

Outside, however, the Haruspices are respected as priests, but do not enjoy greater honors than the other priestly orders, causing relations to occasionally be tense. The Etruscan Haruspices, given their origin, have a high opinion of themselves and their office, every once in a while showing an arrogance that may enrage the most placid of the characters they may be working with.

Every Haruspex has their own Etruscan lituus, the ritual knife with with which they examine the entrails of their victims (see page 187). Losing it is a dire fault, and if it were to happen, the unlucky soul would do anything (for better or worse) to recover it.

LUCUMONES

Average Value: DV8
1 die: De Bello, De Corpore, Hit Points
2 dice: De Magia, De Scientia, Ratio, Sensibilitas
3 dice: De Societate
Hit Points: 8
Weapons: Sica (Damage 4)
Protections: None

ᛉ *Magic Powers:* Curse (2DV, the target must *hear* the Lucumon), Fate Roll

The lucumones (sing. *lucumon*) were ancient leaders of the Etruscan cities, both a king and a priest, in the same way of ancient Rome. Today, this title is only honorary and granted to the most respected of the magistrates of an Etruscan city, or so it is officially said. In truth, the Lucumon of a city is accurately selected among the most illustrious citizens whose allegiance to the Brotherhood of the Twelve Peoples, the Etruscan group attempting to restore their rule over Etruria and the Empire (see page 158), is beyond question. Once, the lucumones were twelve, as the cities of the Dodecapolys, while now their number is unknown, for their task now is a secret mission.

The lucumones form a secret diplomatic network, they are skilled in politics, charismatic, and insightful, allowing them to conceive intricate plans over long spans of time and skillfully move pawns. The revolution they are planning, in fact, is not necessarily one through arms, unless strictly necessary. The lucumones wish to regain power with a slow, constant, and silent conquest that they believe to be steadier and destined to last longer than just using the might of arms.

Lucumones are intelligent and ruthless, speaking different languages to weave relationships with other people and further their goals. They are wise, claiming knowledge is power, and unscrupulous, for the end justifies the means. Among them are also also many women, too, lovers of key figures of Imperial or provincial politics, or incorruptible mothers and wives of families both noble and plebeian.

To all this, the lucumones add priestly skills, because even religion for them is a path to power, making them skilled seers and, even more importantly, expert in casting many different curses. They are led by the Zilath (see below).

ZILATH

Average Value: DV10
1 die: De Bello, De Corpore, Hit Points
2 dice: De Bello (Tactics), De Scientia, Ratio, Sensibilitas
3 dice: De Magia, De Societate
Hit Points: 10
Weapons: Scramasax (Damage 5)
Protections: None

ᛉ *Magic Powers:* Curse (2DV, the target must *hear* the Zilath), Fate Roll, Lightning

The Zilath (sing and plur. are identical) was in ancient times the supreme leader of the Etruscan League, elected yearly by the twelve lucumones. Today, officially, this office does not exist anymore, falling alongside Etruscan power. In truth, it is still very much present among the secret Brotherhood of the Twelve Peoples (see page 158), for they have kept ancient traditions alive, including this secret leader.

A zilath must have exceptional qualities as a diplomat and politician and a deep knowledge of every facet of the ancient Etrusca Disciplina, the theoretical and practical notions about the relations between the human and divine worlds. As such, they can identify patterns in supernatural manifestations and how to exploit them to further the conspiracy. The Zilath acts both as a Haruspex and Fulgurator and, in addition, is capable of reading the most ancient prophetic texts of their people, possibly even owning some of the texts considered to be lost.

It is said that the zilath were gifted a longer life by the Etruscan gods, one of the reasons behind their great skill in weaving long-lasting plans. Surely, being expert in every prophetic discipline, they are greater seers and can plan many generations ahead.

In the past, the Zilath was also the leader of their people in war. Today, though the Brotherood prefers to avoid direct confrontation because it may compromise the secrecy of the Brotherhood, the Zilath still maintains the attributes of a strategist. No zilath would ever back down from a fight if it serves the cause, and they are always ready to offer their own life, if it ensures the survival of the Etruscan cause.

ANIMALS

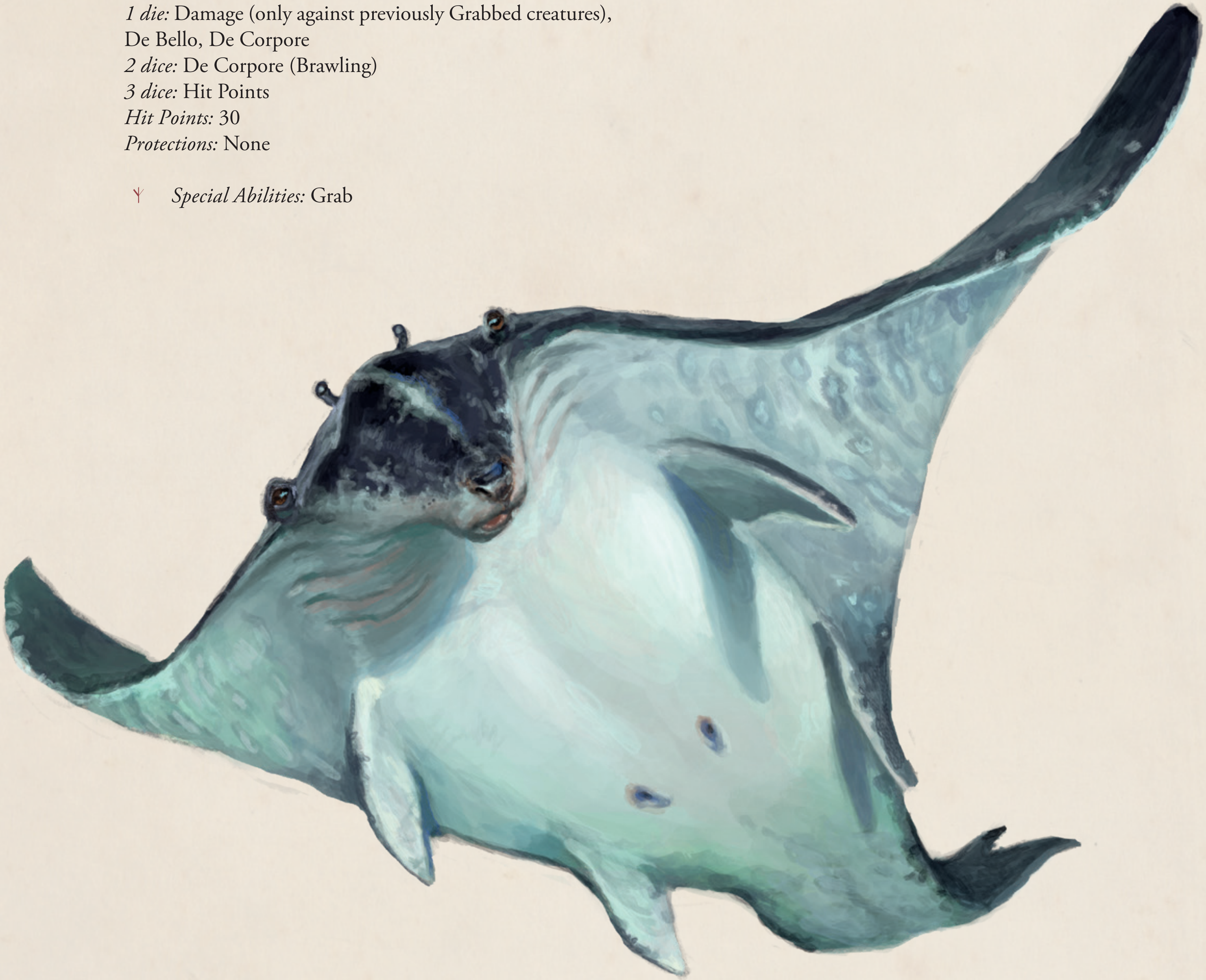
The following animals and fantastical creatures live in and infest the darkest and most dangeorus reaches of the province. The earlier reports provide numerous suggestions on how to use them, but the Demiurge may, of course, employ them at their own discretion, even in other areas of the Empire.

WATER OX

Size: 4
Average Value: DV10
1 die: Damage (only against previously Grabbed creatures), De Bello, De Corpore
2 dice: De Corpore (Brawling)
3 dice: Hit Points
Hit Points: 30
Protections: None

- *Special Abilities:* Grab

Water Oxen are enormous acquatic creatures, exceptionally wide and flat, with a white belly and the back of the deepest black. However, they have little mouths, and teeth so minute that when they open their jaws it is impossible to spot them. This is a generally peaceful creature that feeds on great amounts of fish, although attacks on human beings have been recorded.



LUPI IGUVINI (WOLVES OF IGUVIUM)

Size: 3
Average Value: DV8
1 die: Damage
2 dice: De Bello, Hit Points
3 dice: De Corpore, Sensibilitas
Hit Points: 16
Protections: None

- *Special Abilities:* Acute Senses

The *Lupus Iguvinum* is much larger and stronger than the common wolf, growing to the size of a young bear. As impressive as it may be, however, it is not a supernatural creature. It can break through wooden palisades, piercing the armor and breaking the limbs of a man with a bite. Fire does not scare it, and it attacks during the day, too. Fortunately, it is a lonely creature, and it is rare to find it roaming in packs.

PICAE

Size: 1
Average Value: DV3
1 die: De Bello, Hit Points
2 dice: De Corpore
3 dice: Sensibilitas
Hit Points: 3
Protections: None

- *Special Abilities:* Acute Senses, Flight, Illusion* (3DV, voice mimicry), Stealthy

** Although Illusion is normally considered a magic power, in the case of the Picae it is an ordinary feature.*

The picae (sing. *pica*) are birds similar to magpies, capable of imitating the human voice and speaking the language of men, although at a reduced vocabulary. As wondrous as it seems, it is not a supernatural creature, and the intelligence of even the brightest specimens of pica is rather limited.

MONSTROUS ANIMALS

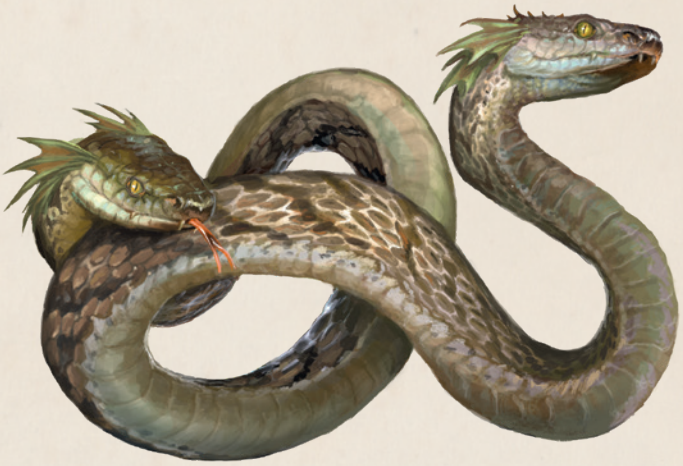
AMPHISBAENAE

Degree of Danger: 2
Size: 2
Average Value: DV6
1 die: Damage, Hit Points
2 dice: Sensibilitas
3 dice: De Bello, De Corpore
Hit Points: 6
Protections: None

- *Special Abilities:* Poison (2DV)
- *Magic Powers:* Multiple Heads (2)

I Degree of Success
The Amphisbaenae (sing. *Amphisbaena*) are snakes with a head on each extremity, capable of slithering in both directions. They are found especially in the southern regions of Italia, as well as in Africa.

II or III Degree of Success
The bite of the Amphisbaena injects a strong poison, but it is said that its skin, wrapped around a wooden staff, keeps away any kind and number of serpents.



DIPSAS

Degree of Danger: 2
Size: 1
Average Value: DV5
1 die: Damage, Hit Points
2 dice: Sensibilitas
3 dice: De Bello, De Corpore
Hit Points: 5
Protections: None

- *Special Abilities:* Poison* (3DV; resisted by Ratio instead of by Vigor), Stealthy

** The Poisoned victim loses Ratio points instead of Hit Points. Once they reach 0 Ratio, they are driven mad and drink until death.*

I Degree of Success
The Dipsas is a snake, smaller than a viper, usually nesting around the few springs in arid places, hiding under the rocks. There, they wait for a traveler to look for water, then bite. Their poison is said to cause great thirst, perhaps to dilute the toxin.

II or III Degree of Success
The poison of the Dipsas is not deadly per se, but causes great thirst, that may drive its victim to madness, as they drink until they die. Healing or sacred waters (like those of the Magic Springs, see page 108) offer temporary relief, slowing the effects of the madness and enabling finding a definitive cure. One such cure is to imbibe a pinch of dust from the dried skin of an Amphisbaena.

SACRED ANIMALS

AETNEAN HOUNDS

Size: 3
Average Value: DV6
1 die: Damage
2 dice: De Bello, Hit Points
3 dice: De Corpore, Sensibilitas
Hit Points: 12
Protections: None

- *Special Abilities:* Acute Senses, Pack Tactics
- *Magic Powers:* Fate Roll, Invulnerability (to damage from the *Debilitated* condition)

I Degree of Success
They are lean, long-legged hounds, with golden sand fur, yellow eyes, and long ears, slightly similar to those of the Egyptian god Anubis. According to Sicilian legends, they are direct descendants of the mythical dogs of the god Adranòs, wardens of his shrine and priests. In their veins, then, is said to flow the blood of these divine dogs, although greatly diluted, held to be the reason behind their incredible resistance to exhaustion, hunger, and thirst, and even their ability to kill much larger animals.

II Degree of Success
Smart and most loyal, they seem capable of forming a mental link of sorts that makes them aware of the location of their masters, even when separated by a great distance. Maybe it is just their great sense of smell, for they are capable of tracking even on wet terrain, after it has rained and smells are washed away by water.

III Degree of Success
Although there are packs of wild Aetnean Hounds around the sacred volcano, the majority of them are bred, and sold at steep prices. In spite of the loving care of their breeders, there are not very many of them, as their females give birth only to an average of two pups each year, although their innate resistance ensures that all of them make it to adulthood.

BIRDS OF DIOMEDES

Size: 2
Average Value: DV4
1 die: Damage, Hit Points
2 dice: De Bello, De Corpore
3 dice: Sensibilitas
Hit Points: 4
Protections: None

- *Special Abilities:* Acute Senses, Flight
- *Magic Powers:* Fate Roll, Illusion (3DV, voice mimicry)

I Degree of Success
This particular species of bird, also called *cataractae*, has eyes and beak the color of fire, and white feathers. In origin, they were retainers of Diomedes, king of Argos, who died, as he was returning from the Trojan War, on an island off the coast of Apulia, one of the so-called Tremiti at first, because they were three in number, and then later Diomedean, in his honor. His distraught companions remained watching over his burial until the gods, moved to pity, turned them into these birds, still mourning to this day. Passing ships can hear them crying from afar.

II Degree of Success
Diomedean Birds always have two leaders, one leading the flock, and the other watching its rear. Their nests always have two entrances, one to the east from which they leave, and one to the west they use to enter it.
Even as animals, they do not forget their former Greek nature, welcoming any Greek who lands on their island by opening their wings in an embrace. If petted by a Greek, they sit on their lap, at their service. For everyone else, cataractae have only cold indifference.

III Degree of Success
In truth, to have the attention of the Diomedean Birds, it is not necessary to be of Greek birth, but only to proficiently speak their language, for the Birds understand it clearly. Being capable of mimicking human voice, just like the Picae, if somebody converses with them for long enough, they learn to speak like their interlocutor, and so can answer small questions and obey simple orders. Should a Diomedean Bird see a Greek-speaking person under attack, they immediately rush to their aid.

FANTASTICAL CREATURES

BADALISCI

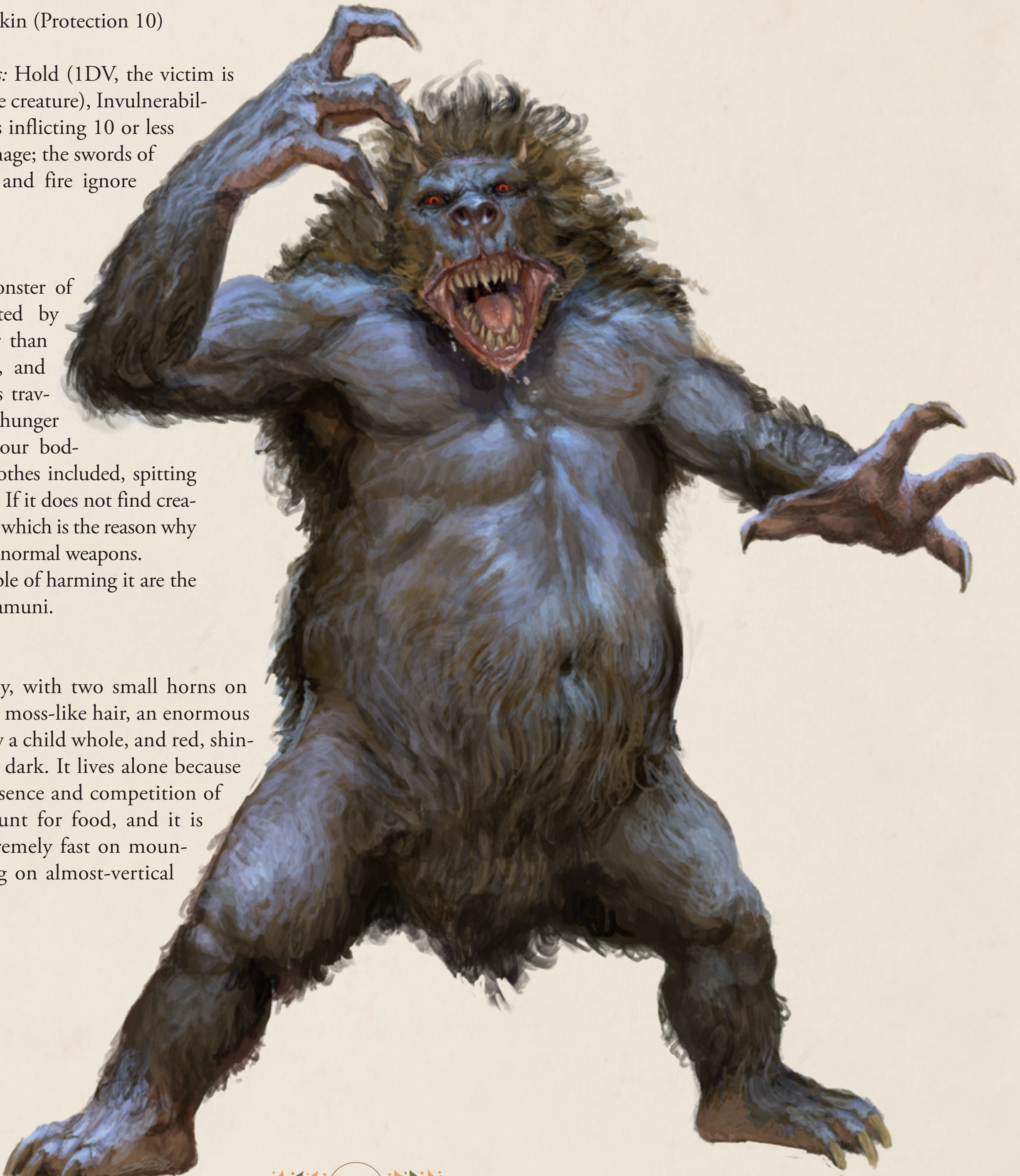
Degree of Danger: 3
Size: 4
Average Value: DV10
1 die: Damage, Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Bello, De Corpore
3 dice: De Corpore (Climbing), Hit Points
Hit Points: 30
Protections: Stone skin (Protection 10)

Magic Powers: Hold (1DV, the victim is *touched* by the creature), Invulnerability (to all hits inflicting 10 or less points of damage; the swords of the Camuni and fire ignore this power)

I Degree of Success
The Badaliscus is a monster of the mountains inhabited by the Camuni. It is taller than a man, roughly 7 feet, and much heavier. It attacks travelers out of unbound hunger that compels it to devour bodies whole, bones and clothes included, spitting away only metal objects. If it does not find creatures to eat, it eats rocks, which is the reason why its skin is impervious to normal weapons.
The only weapons capable of harming it are the ancient swords of the Camuni.

II Degree of Success
A Badaliscus looks ugly, with two small horns on its head and long, thin, moss-like hair, an enormous mouth that can swallow a child whole, and red, shining eyes that see in the dark. It lives alone because it cannot stand the presence and competition of its own kind in the hunt for food, and it is scared of fire. It is extremely fast on mountainous terrain, moving on almost-vertical cliffs like a spider.

III Degree of Success
The Badaliscus can use the Hold magic power on mountain rocks to lock them into place and avoid being buried when climbing, as well as to ensure itself a steadier grip on animals or people. However, in addition to the sword of the Camuni and fire, it is vulnerable to *arsenikon* dust, which causes it piercing pains and inhibits its magic power. A Badaliscus is not an intelligent creature, and, completely dominated by its hunger, pounces on anything that looks vaguely edible, regardless of the risks. An adequate bait, then, is a powerful tool against a Badaliscus.



RUMORS OR TRUTH?

The following descriptions of fantastical creatures are articulated on three layers of information. It is taken for granted that there is not much reliable lore about these creatures, so what little is available is the fruit of hearsay, legends, and folk rumors, that with time have blurred the divide between truth and fiction.
The Peritiae and Specialties to be used in the search for information about a specific creature is at the discretion of the Demiurge, but generally follows these guidelines:

- **De Natura** for animals with unnatural characteristics or hybrid creatures.
- **De Magia** for creatures of mythology or folklore.
- **De Scientia** for creatures from literature.

The DT is usually 9, lowered to 6 if the Custos has studied the specific matter or is from the same region as the creature.

CHIMERAE OF ARRETIUM

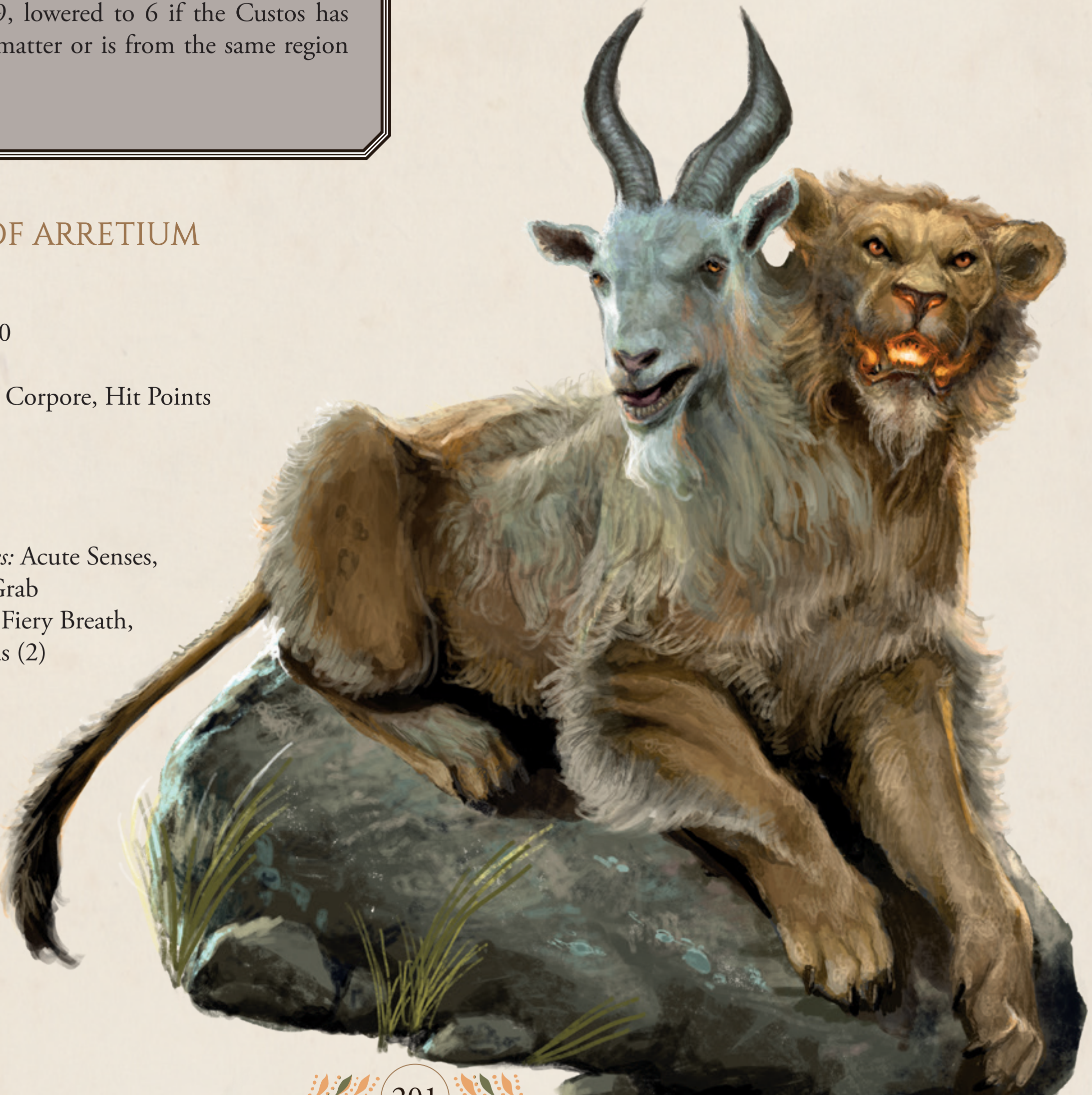
Degree of Danger: 3
Size: 3
Average Value: DV10
1 die: Damage
2 dice: De Bello, De Corpore, Hit Points
3 dice: -
Hit Points: 20
Protections: None

- *Special Abilities:* Acute Senses, Dive, Flight, Grab
- *Magic Powers:* Fiery Breath, Multiple Heads (2)

I Degree of Success
Around Arretium live one or more Chimerae typical of the area, different from those found in other regions of the Empire. Legends about these cruel and bloodthirsty creatures are numerous, and often enriched with rather imaginative details of their appearance and nature, such as the rumor that some are the result of Etruscan magic experiments.

II Degree of Success
The Chimerae of Arretium have the body of a lion and a ram's head, but lack the snake head on their tails and are generally smaller. Although one could think they are less dangerous, whoever has met them has never returned, seemingly hinting at considerable ferocity.

III Degree of Success
In addition to the breath of flame, common to all Chimerae, the Arretium variety has the unusual capacity to fly, although wingless. How this is possible is not known, but this unexpected advantage is extremely powerful in combat.



DRACAENAE

Degree of Danger: 4
Size: 3
Average Value: DV12
1 die: Damage, Ratio
2 dice: De Bello, De Corpore, Hit Points, Sensibilitas
3 dice: De Societate
Hit Points: 24
Protections: Scaled skin (Protection 6)

- *Special Abilities:* Flight, Grab, Stealthy
- *Magic Powers:* Immortality, Invulnerability (to fire)

I Degree of Success

Dracaenae (sing. *Dracaena*) are feminine monsters related to dragons, as their Greek name, *Drakàinai*, suggests. Their double nature is revealed by the fact that the top half of their bodies is human while the bottom one is monstrous, both legs replaced by serpents. They also have wings and can fly.

II Degree of Success

It is difficult to identify Dracaenae because they can hide their serpentine legs and their wings with long, elegant, and flowing robes. Because they look like wonderful women, they are often successful in charming unsuspecting humans. Like dragons, they are cruel, hungry for violence and power, and lightning fast, but also as cunning, seductive, and duplicitous as humans. They love beautiful jewelry and trinkets.

III Degree of Success

All Dracaenae are immune to fire, and can even magically extinguish flames. Each of them is gifted with unique powers and characteristics (see below).

KAMPE

Kampe is so powerful that Jupiter placed her as the warden of the most remote part of the Underworld, a prison for rebellious gods and monsters. Among them are the Cyclopes and the giants known as "Hecatoncheires", or "Those with a Hundred Hands". Kampe is the most monstrous of the Dracaenae, and, in addition to the draconic body and the wings, she has serpents for hair and a scorpion tail. This does not mean that she, too, cannot take a most beautiful form, leading mortals often to underestimate her danger. She is armed with two poisoned swords, which she uses with great mastery.

- To the profile of the Dracaenae, add the special ability Poison (2DV).

POINE

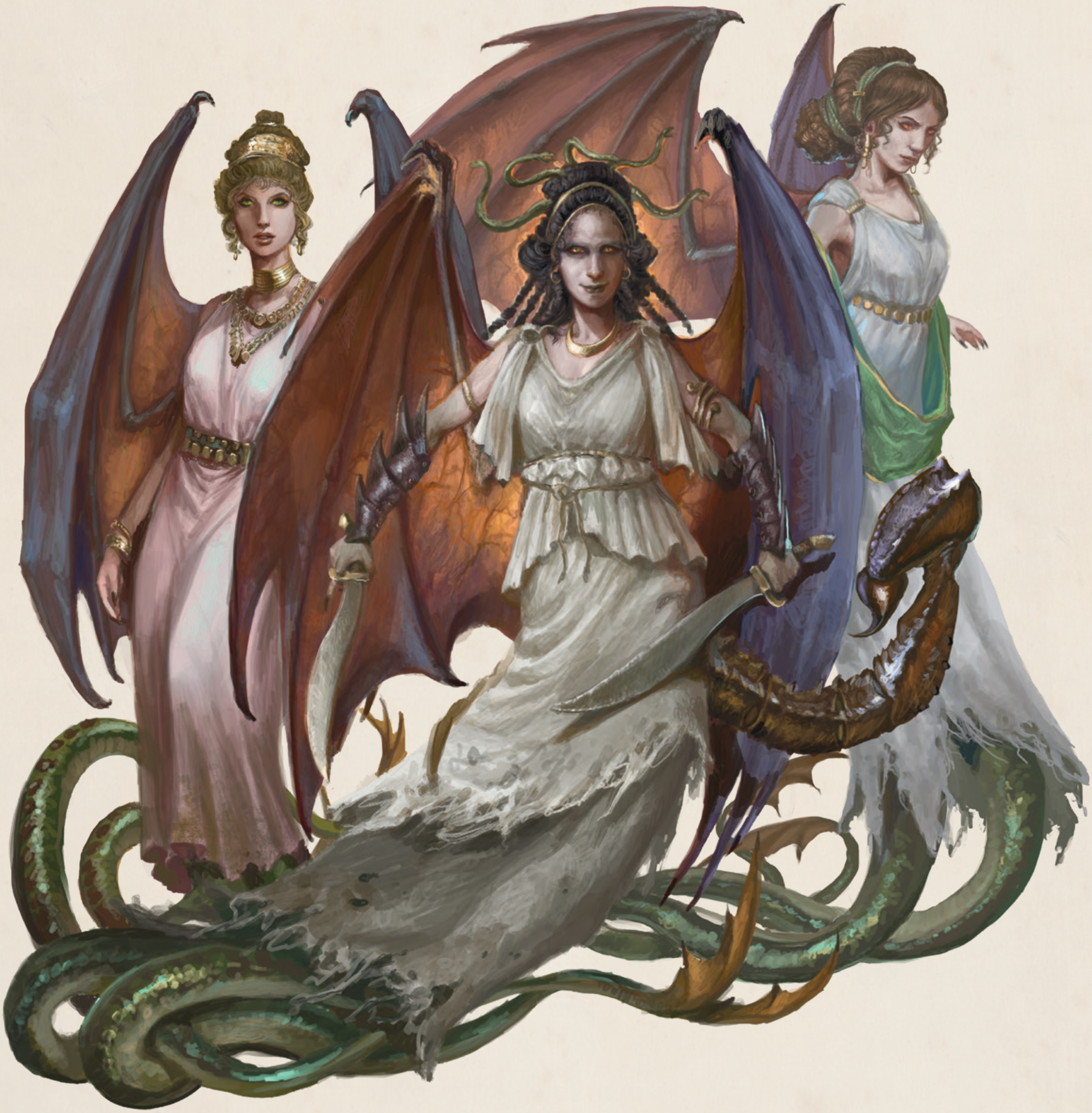
Also called Poena, "pain", by the Romans, she brings endless torment to those who commit crimes of blood, instilling maddening anguish and terror in those condemned by the tribunal of the gods or any who foolishly challenges them. Poine is so powerful and thorough in executing her duty that her enemies take their own lives to make the horrors she fills their minds with stop, long before they even face her in combat.

- To the profile of the Dracaenae, add the magic power Terror (2DV, Poine *fixes her gaze* on the victim).

SIBARIS

Sibaris is the most beautiful of the Dracaenae, and this is a scourge for the young men she enslaves to further the schemes she cannot carry out on her own. One of her kisses is so intoxicating that the poor soul cannot stop doing her bidding until he has done everything beautiful Sibaris has asked of him. He does not feel hunger, thirst, or the need to sleep, slowly withering until he dies (assuming he is not killed first in some absurd enterprise she charges him with).

- To the profile of the Dracaenae, add the Enchantment magic power (2DV, Sibaris *fixes her gaze* on the victim).



DRACONES MEDIOLANENSES

Degree of Danger: 3
Size: 4
Average Value: DV10
1 die: Damage, Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Bello, De Corpore
3 dice: De Corpore (Jumping), Hit Points
Hit Points: 30
Protections: Scaled skin (Protection 5)

- *Special Abilities:* Grab, Poison (2DV)
- *Magic Powers:* Fog, Poisonous Breath

I Degree of Success

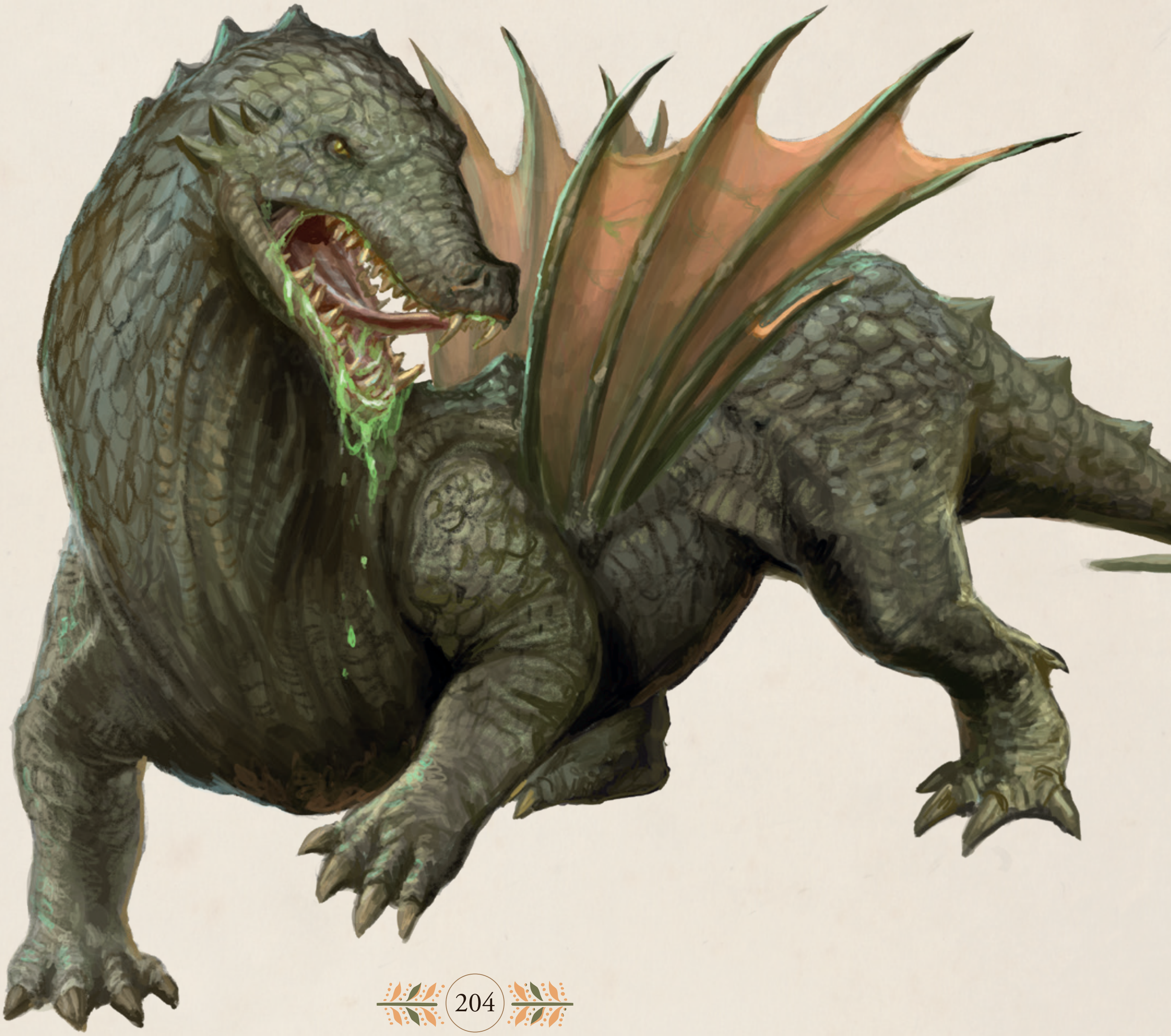
A Draco Mediolanensis is an enormous snake with four short, clawed legs, its mouth dripping dense and poisonous saliva that can contaminate any water it is poured into. Waters poisoned in this way are dreadful for those who bathe in them (Poison, 1DV), or even worse drink them (Poison, 2DV).

II Degree of Success

Dracones Mediolanenses prefer to live in swamplands, but do not like brackish water, possibly why swamps are often so unhealthy. Draco Mediolanenses live mostly around Mediolanum, hence their name, but they have been seen often further south, in the marshland called Palus Gerunda, as well as around ramified rivers that form mires. However, they are never seen around the sea.

III Degree of Success

Like the Magalassi (see below), they emit dense vapors to hide from sight, growing only more dangerous, as their malodorous fog is poisonous for their victims, earning them the monicker of *monstrum brumale foetidum*, the monster of fetid mist. In addition, their small wings, though flightless, allow them to leap over long distances and surprise an enemy. Salt water is said to be toxic to these dragons: while it does not kill them, it seems to make them sick enough to make them flee if someone throws a bucket of salt water on them.



ECHÉNAIS

Degree of Danger: 1
Size: 1
Average Value: DV3
1 die: De Corpore, Hit Points, Sensibilitas
2 dice: -
3 dice: -
Protections: None

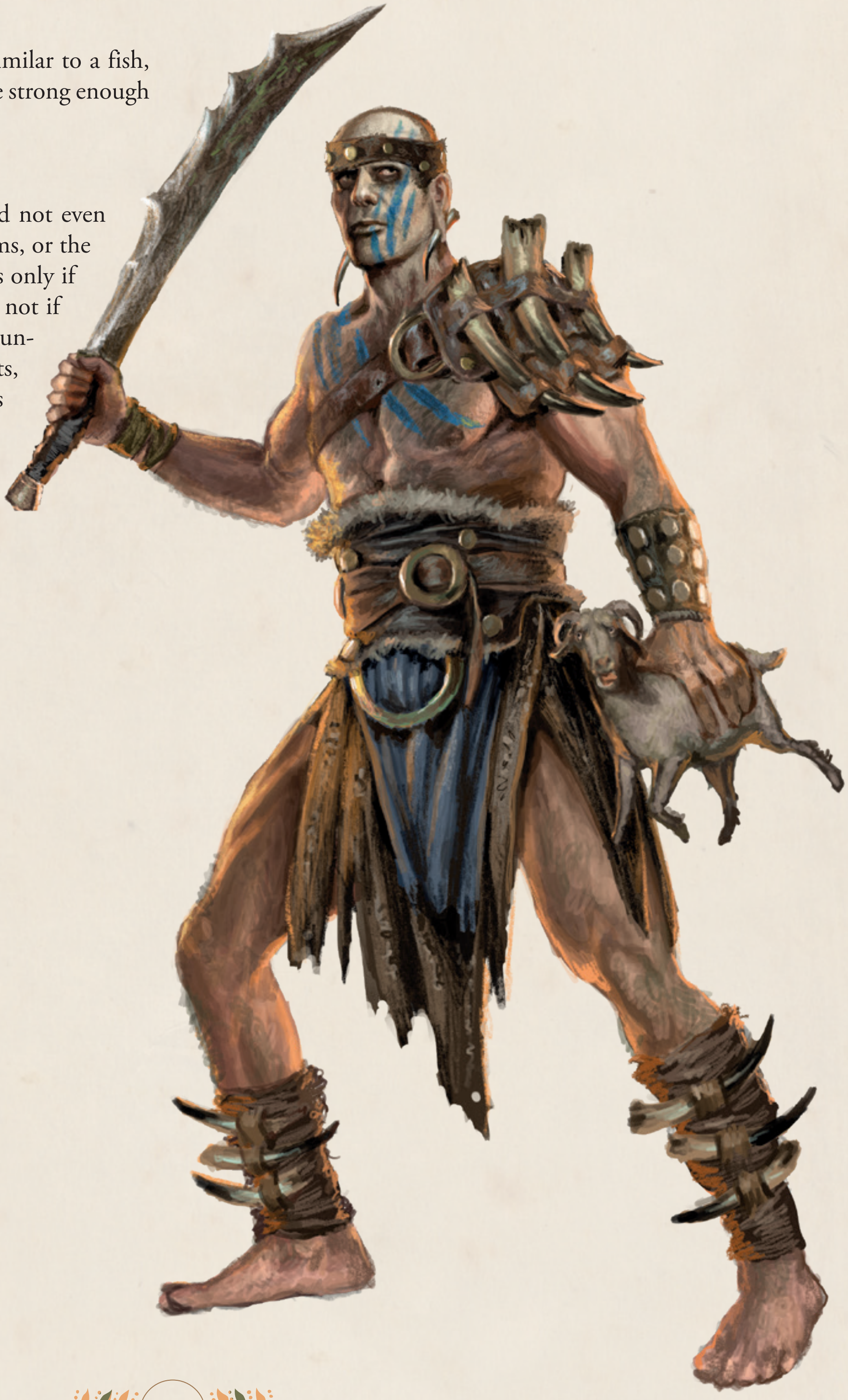
Magic Powers: Hold (3DV, the target is *touched* by the creature)

I Degree of Success
The Echénais is roughly a foot-long creature, similar to a fish, that latches onto the hull of a ship, believed to be strong enough to stop any kind of vessel.

II or III Degree of Success
If it sticks to a hull, the ship cannot move, and not even the strongest natural forces, such as winds, storms, or the tide can dislodge it. This power, however, works only if the Echénais latches onto the hull of the vessel, not if it is brought on board. It is said that there are cunning ship captains who keep some in special vats, to have them latch onto the keels of enemy ships during battle.

LAESTRYGONIANS

Degree of Danger: 3
Size: 4
Average Value: DV12
1 die: Damage, De Scientia (Crafts), Ratio, Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Bello, De Corpore
3 dice: Hit Points
Hit Points: 36
Weapons: Large Spear (Damage 12, also ranged)
Protections: Animal hides (Protection 3), Clipeus (Parry +2)



- *Special Abilities:* Grab (in the tempus in which it attempts to grab a victim, a Laestrygonian does not inflict damage)
- *Magic Powers:* Fate Roll

I Degree of Success
The Laestrygonians are giants, descendants of the God of the Sea, Neptune, who sired Laestrygon, the first of them, with Gea. Once, they lived in Sicilia, like all the ancient giants, but then they moved to Sardinia, leaving Sicilia to the Cyclopes, and from there settling remote Corsica. Unlike the Cyclopes, the Laestrygonians have two eyes and are man-eaters, with no pity for mortals.

II Degree of Success
In spite of their hostility, the Laestrygonians are not as barbarous as the Cyclopes. They are led by a king, and fight in organized phalanxes, as well as being capable of producing great works of art. They make colossal marble statues with stylized and disconcerting features that every now and then resurface, shattered, in steep places. Finding these statues is a dire omen, for their finders may be about to wander into areas lived in by the giants.

III Degree of Success
The Laestrygonians live in a fortified city called Telepylos, a name that means “the City of Strong Walls”, somewhere in the heart of Corsica.

LUPI HIRPINI (WOLVES OF HIRPINIA)

Wolf Form
Degree of Danger: 2
Size: 3
Average Value: DV6
1 die: Damage
2 dice: De Bello, Hit Points
3 dice: De Corpore, Sensibilitas
Hit Points: 12
Protections: None

- *Special Abilities:* Acute Senses, Pack Tactics
- *Magic Powers:* Metamorphosis

Human Form
Degree of Danger: 2
Size: 3
Average Value: DV6
1 die: Ratio (only with a human sibling*)
2 dice: De Bello, De Corpore
3 dice: Hit Points, Sensibilitas
Hit Points: 18
Weapons: Spear (Damage 6), only with a human sibling*
Protections: None

- *Special Abilities:* Grab, Pack Tactics
- *Magic Powers:* Metamorphosis

** See description.*

I Degree of Success
Local legends tell that the Hirpini can turn into wolves at will, instead of suffering form a curse like the Versipellis. In fact, there are reliable observations of people who have seen a wolf appearing right where just a moment before was a man.

II Degree of Success
In truth, they are wolves capable of taking human form. However, even if they look like a human being, the wolf remains an animal, not speaking any human language and keeping the intellect of just a smart beast. Not being truly human, they do not know how to use weapons, and so fight bare-handed.

III Degree of Success
Some of the Hirpini know how to bind themselves to these wolves in friendship. Usually, it is an ability passed down from one generation to another that binds a family with a wolfpack. If a human child and a wolf pup are born on the same day, the two are destined to be bound for life and are considered siblings. The wolf can turn into a human upon request of their sibling, taking some of their “humanity”, so for that time the wolf becomes human and the human remains so, although taking on some lupine traits.

MAGALASSI

Degree of Danger: 2
Size: 4
Average Value: DV8
1 die: Damage, Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Bello, De Corpore
3 dice: Hit Points
Hit Points: 24
Protections: Scaled skin (Protection 4)

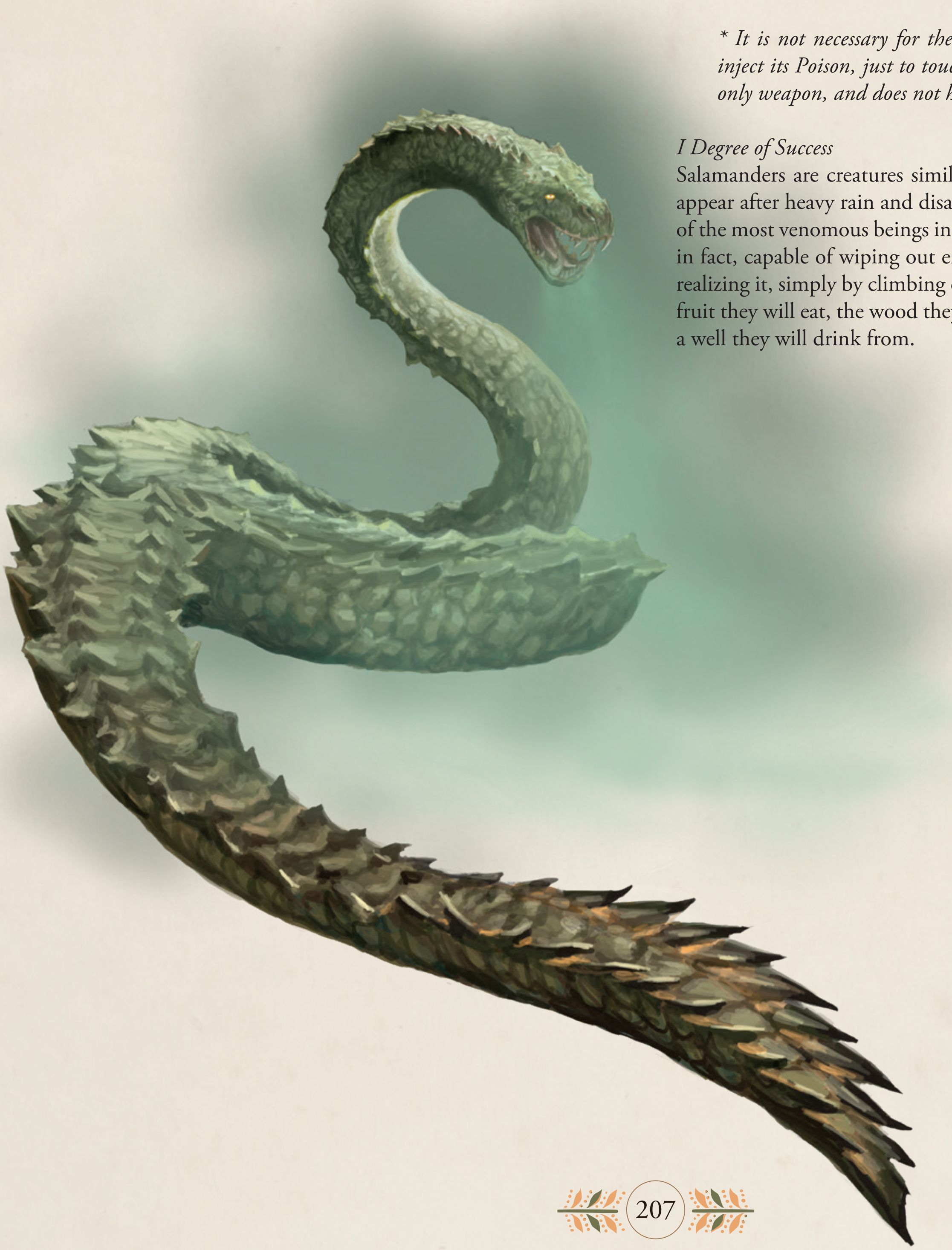
- *Special Abilities:* Charge, Grab
- *Magic Powers:* Fog, Stealthy

I Degree of Success
Among the farmers who live in Aemilia, it is said that local river waters, from the majestic Padus to the most modest of streams, are haunted by the Magalassi (sing. Magalassus). Their description is often confusing; some claim they are impossible to see because they are always surrounded by their mist, while others say the Magalassi can change their color to blend with their surroundings. Other even say they are black and hard to find because they move at night.

II Degree of Success
Magalassi are serpentine creatures with long, sharp fangs. They live in small rivers, irrigation canals, and the like, where they easily hide, surrounding themselves in a thick pall that they breathe through their nostrils and mouths. They prefer to live in the lower plains of Aemilia, where they spread their thick fog along the less-traveled roads in order to devour disoriented travelers, and because of this, their scholars define them

monstra brumalia, monsters of the fog. They are the size of a small dragon, usually between 9 and 12 feet long, hiding during the day and leaving at night.

III Degree of Success
The Magalassus' real color is black, and because of this it blends perfectly with the dark waters of muddy rivers, although sometimes its presence is revealed by a rainbow reflection off its wet skin, a colorful dragon for the shortest of seconds.



SALAMANDERS

Degree of Danger: 2
Size: 1
Average Value: DV8
1 die: Hit Points, Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Bello, De Corpore
3 dice: -
Hit Points: 8
Protections: None

- *Special Abilities:* Poison (3DV, the victim is *touched* by the creature)*
- *Magic Powers:* Invulnerability (to fire)

** It is not necessary for the Salamander to deal damage to inject its Poison, just to touch its victim. This ability is their only weapon, and does not have a Damage rating.*

I Degree of Success
Salamanders are creatures similar to large, spotted lizards that appear after heavy rain and disappear when the sky is clear, one of the most venomous beings in the world. A single specimen is, in fact, capable of wiping out entire populations without them realizing it, simply by climbing on a tree and contaminating the fruit they will eat, the wood they will use as fuel, or the water of a well they will drink from.

II Degree of Success
The strongest concentration of poison is in their dense, off-white saliva, so powerful that skin contact is enough to cause all the body hair to fall off, leaving a permanent white, colorless patch. The only known remedy is the Cantharis potion, while some authors claim that Salamanders preserved in honey, after removing guts, legs, and heads, have an aphrodisiac effect.

III Degree of Success
They are cold beings, capable of extinguishing fire just by touching it, and therefore invulnerable to heat. However, they can be harmed by their own cold; if trapped in a container then filled with water, a Salamander freezes it, remaining trapped in the ice. The ice block must then be handled with gloves, preventing its saliva from doing harm. But beware! The ice must never melt, or not only will the Salamander break free of its prison, but it will also turn the water into a powerful poison.

SEA SCOLOPENDRAE

Degree of Danger: 4
Size: 5
Average Value: DV20
1 die: Damage, De Bello, De Corpore, Sensibilitas
2 dice: -
3 dice: Hit Points
Hit Points: 60
Protections: Carapace (Protection 10)

I Degree of Success
They are fearsome sea monsters, although being aquatic their actual size is unknown. Some, however, claim they are neither that big nor that dangerous.

II Degree of Success
Their danger is underestimated because they look smaller than they actually are. The creatures float semi-submerged, poking out only their ugly heads, with enormous hairs poking out of their nostrils, out of the water.

III Degree of Success
The body of a Sea Scolopendra has the mass of a trireme, while its flat tail resembles that of a lobster. It moves by pushing its body with its numerous rows of feet, orderly like the oars of a ship.

ETRUSCAN DEMONS

CHARUN

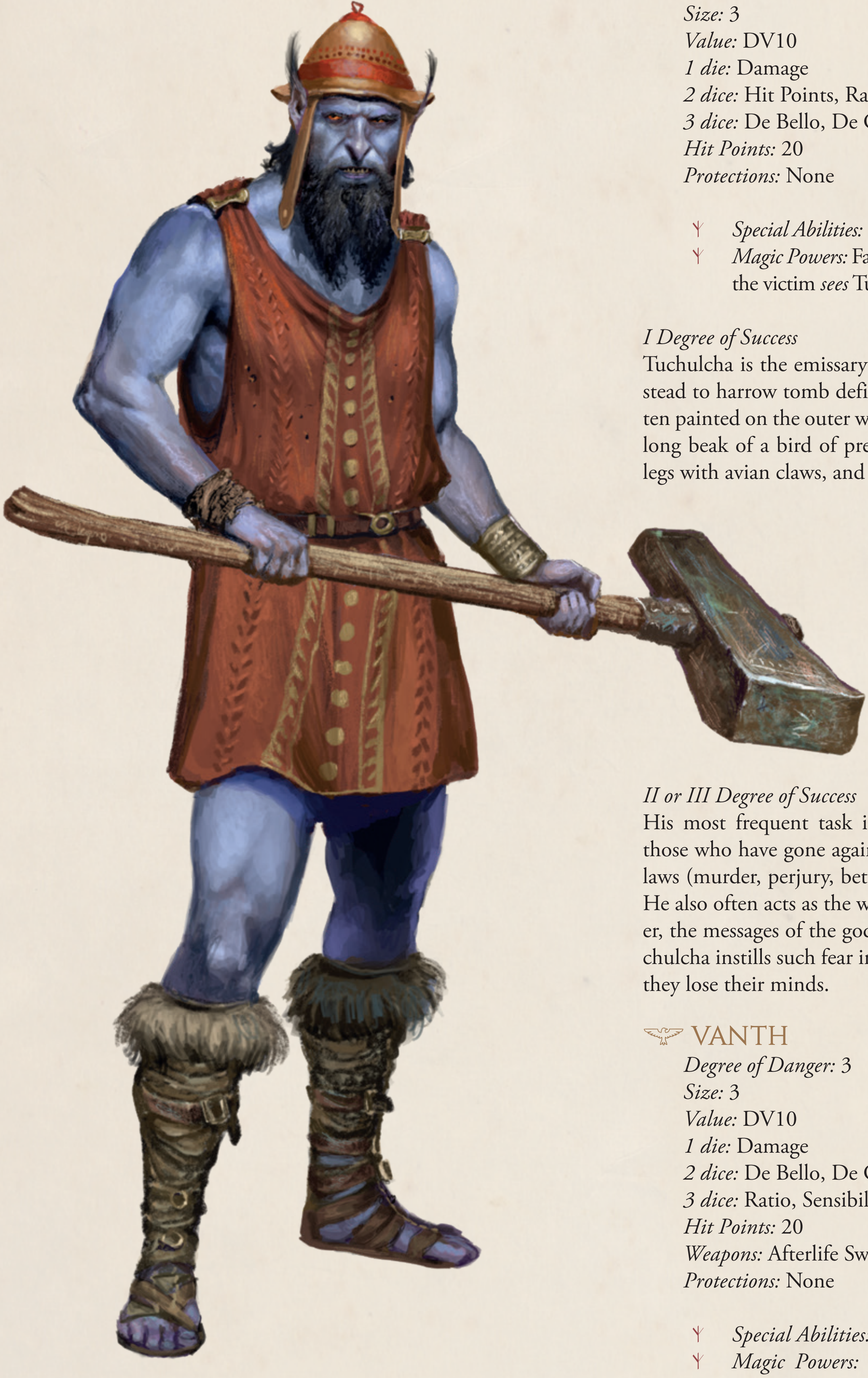
Degree of Danger: 5
Size: 3
Value: DV12
1 die: Damage
2 dice: De Bello, De Corpore, Sensibilitas
3 dice: Hit Points, Ratio
Hit Points: 36
Weapons: Afterlife Maul (Damage 14, two handed)
Protections: None

- *Special Abilities:* Acute Senses
- *Magic Powers:* Fate Roll, Immortality, Prophecy, Soul Sucking (1DV), Terror (2DV, the victim *sees* or is *wounded* by Charun)

I Degree of Success
Charun is the Etruscan god who watches over the Afterlife. He is a fearsome creature, a blue-skinned Demon bound in corded muscle, with a spiked beard and a hooked nose. He leads the souls to the Afterlife, the worthy to the Elysian Fields or the wicked to Tartarus.

II Degree of Success
Charun is not actually a Demon, but a proper god of the dead. He lords over violent deaths, and his appearance usually means somebody is about to die. He is armed with an enormous hammer, with which he drives a nail into tomb doors to seal them and prevent the souls of the deceased from returning among the living. Because he protects the dead, Charun is also a skilled seer, knowing all of the past and being able to interpret the future.

III Degree of Success
Defiling a tomb, or even just removing the nail-seal, unleashes his boundless wrath and earns the perpetrator immediate retribution. He appears in front of the defiler, and his mere sight is enough to fill the poor soul with dread. Charun then either ends their existence, striking with his maul, or lets them wallow in fear before committing righteous murder. He does not attack those who enter tombs defiled by somebody else, but often appears to warn them and, at times, demand a reparation for the wrong done. Whoever acts on his behalf receives from him divine gratitude, while those who do not are not immediately punished, but still incur in his hostility.



TUCHULCHA

Degree of Danger: 4
Size: 3
Value: DV10
1 die: Damage
2 dice: Hit Points, Ratio, Sensibilitas
3 dice: De Bello, De Corpore
Hit Points: 20
Protections: None

- *Special Abilities:* Flight, Poison (1DV)
- *Magic Powers:* Fate Roll, Immortality, Terror (2DV, the victim *sees* Tuchulcha), Unnatural Speed

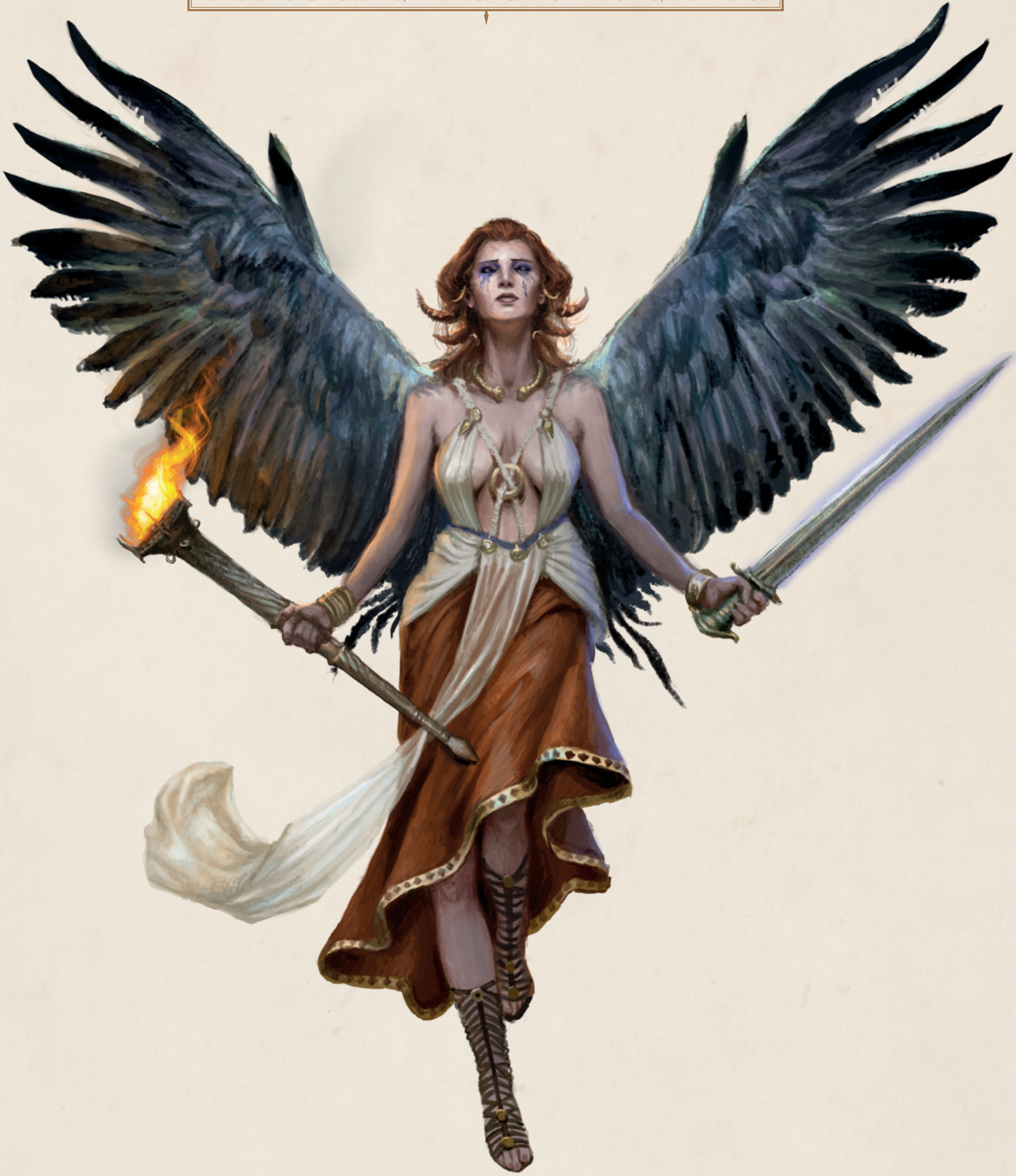
I Degree of Success
Tuchulcha is the emissary of Charun, and often appears in his stead to harrow tomb defilers. His monstrous appearance is often painted on the outer walls of a burial, a twisted face with the long beak of a bird of prey, demonic wings, long asinine ears, legs with avian claws, and snakes on his head.

II or III Degree of Success
His most frequent task is harrowing with madness and fear those who have gone against the most sacred moral and divine laws (murder, perjury, betrayal of hospitality) or tomb defilers. He also often acts as the winged messenger of Charun. However, the messages of the god are not always heard, for divine Tuchulcha instills such fear in those who see him that occasionally they lose their minds.

VANTH

Degree of Danger: 3
Size: 3
Value: DV10
1 die: Damage
2 dice: De Bello, De Corpore, Hit Points
3 dice: Ratio, Sensibilitas
Hit Points: 20
Weapons: Afterlife Sword (Damage 10)
Protections: None

- *Special Abilities:* Acute Senses, Flight
- *Magic Powers:* Fate Roll, Immortality, Permanent Wounds, Prophecy, Soul sucking (1DV)



I Degree of Success
Vanth, Lady of the Afterlife, is the companion of Charun, known for her sweet melancholy, for she knows the brevity of human lives. She looks like a breathtakingly beautiful and sad winged woman, and bears the torch of life. She wears a tunic of Etruscan make, ribbons crossing on her chest, and embroidered footwear.

II or III Degree of Success
Like the Greek Parcae, it is she who ends a human life, often appearing to the dying with a sword in her hand, to cut their thread. She is a herald of death, bearing an upturned and extinguished torch, the sign that soon a life will be snuffed out. Vanth is also a skilled seer, and, if worshiped with adequate courtesy, can grant visions. In exchange, she requires an offering of asphodelus flowers. Although looking sweet and delicate, Vanth does not shy away from combat if provoked, turning into a ruthless enemy.

THE LASA

Degree of Danger: 2
Size: 3
Average Value: DV8
1 die: De Bello, Hit Points, Ratio
2 dice: De Corpore
3 dice: De Magia, Sensibilitas
Weapons: None
Protections: None

ᛉ *Magic Powers:* Fate Roll, Illusion (2DV), Immortality, Prophecy, Terror* (3DV, the Lasa *fixes her gaze* on the victim)

** In addition to its normal effects, Terror caused by the Lasa can lead to madness. With a III Degree of Success, her victim is driven mad, and their Ratio score becomes 0. If the victim is a Custos, they become an NPC under the control of the Demiurge until they receive adequate care.*

I Degree of Success
The Lasa are five magical, nymph-like sisters who live in a dimension halfway between that of men and that of the gods and are gifted with foresight. In ancient times, it was not difficult to meet them in everyday life, with many legends telling of their interactions with humankind. They are generally held to be benign, but also fickle. An encounter with them should be handled with care.

II Degree of Success
Though they look like delicate maidens, none should ever be so foolish as to defy them, for they are still immortal deities who wield supernatural power.

III Degree of Success
Their names are Achununa, Racuneta, Sitmica, Thimrae, and Vecuvia, each with her own unique characteristics (see below).

ACHUNUNA

Auchuna can reduce the difficulty of all Auctoritas rolls of her proteges by 1 level, for an amount of time that can range from a day to a week, as she makes them more authoritative and charismatic, and better leaders. Her domain is Divination, especially the *Ars Fulguratoria*, *Sideratio*, and *Lightning Summoning* rituals. Her favor allows to lower the difficulty for those rituals by 1 level.

RACUNETA

She is a healer who never refuses her care to the sick or seriously wounded, for whom she can lower the difficulty of all Vigor rolls to heal from illness and poison by 1 level. If she is particularly well disposed towards a character, she can even gift them a dose of the magic potion she keeps in a small alabaster vessel, a universal antidote for every poison or a pharmakon so powerful it can heal all damage in but an instant. Should she, however, see somebody poisoning people, animals, water, or food, her wrath is a sight to behold, inflicting with her barest *touch* a Poison (3DV) that can only be cured with magic (as is the case with the Permanent Wounds magic power). Her domain is *Oraculum* rituals, as she speaks through the mouth of the ritual's officiant, lowering its difficulty by 1 level.

SITMICA

Shy and reserved, if followed and pushed against her will, she briefly turns her pursuers into snakes, to escape undisturbed (Metamorphosis on Others, 3DV, Sitmica *fixes her gaze* on the victim). She lowers the difficulty of all Coordinatio rolls of her proteges by 1 level, increasing their speed, dexterity, and reaction times for a time that can range from a day to a week, depending on her fickle whims. She is versed in interpreting animal-borne omens, such as *Auspicium* and some types of Omen, lowering their difficulty by 1 level, as well as being capable of conjuring omens regarding her domain.

THIMRAE

Whoever is successful in winning her carefree attention can lower the difficulty of all Ingenium rolls by 1 level, becoming more inventive and of a sharper mind. However, conversely, she can also increase that same difficulty for anyone she discovers mistreating the weak or children. She is particularly skilled in the *Speculum* ritual, lowering its difficulty by 1 level if performed in her presence and following her instructions.

VECUVIA

Vecuvia is used to appearing in the dreams of mortals gifted with foresight, to whom she may suggest the solutions to many different problems, grant visions, and lower the difficulty of all Sensibilitas rolls by 1 level. She can also send nerve-wracking nightmares to the impious, driving them mad when necessary (as per the Terror power, above). She is mistress of *Haruspicina* and *Somnii Interpretatio*, and her intercession (or apparition in a dream) lowers their difficulty by 1 level.

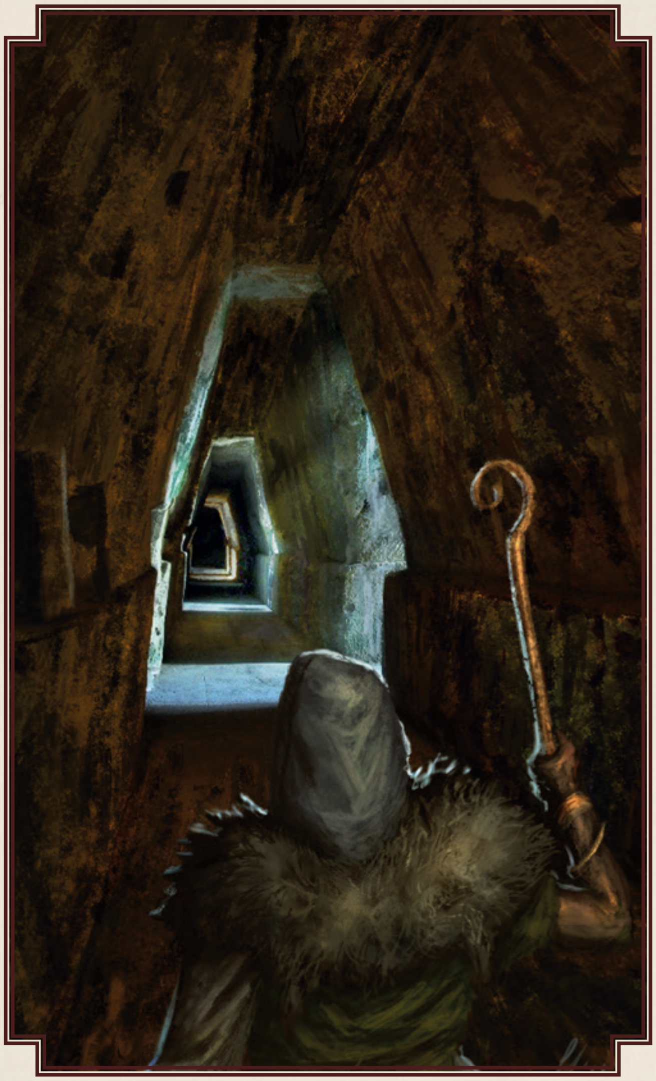
PART VI

ADVENTURES

THE CAVE OF THE SIBYLLA

Leap out upon the Hesperian strand;
Some seek the fiery sparkles, sown
Deep in the veins of cold flint-stone:
Some fell the silvan-haunted woods,
And point with joy to new-found floods.
But to the height Æneas hies
Where Phœbus holds his seat,
And seeks the cave of wondrous size,
The Sibyl's dread retreat,
The Sibyl, whom the Delian seer
Inspires to see the future clear,
And fills with frenzy's heat:
The grove they enter, and behold
Above their heads the roof of gold.

(Vergil, *Aeneid,* Book VI, lines 5-15)



INTRODUCTION FOR THE PLAYERS

It is the fifth day before the Ides of June (June 9th). You are in Campania, on the beautiful island of Capreae, where the Emperor Theodomirus owns one of his most popular summer residences. And it is precisely the Emperor himself who summoned you in the middle of the night, following an event as unexpected as it was worrying: the Sibylla Cumana has had a bad omen and, fearing for her life, sent Farnax, a priest of Apollo, to ask for protection. The Emperor commands you to go immediately to Cumae, together with Farnax, with the very delicate task of protecting the Sibylla. The life of the Sibylla is one of the most precious treasures of the Empire and must be protected by an Élite unit, ready to face the mysteries that always surround this special prophetess.

INTRODUCTION FOR THE DEMIURGE

The Magister Militum of the Praefectura Orientalis, **Spartacus Albius**, is about to rebel against Imperial authority. He has just reached Brundisium, from which he is riding with four soldiers as escort to the island of Capreae, in the gulf of Neapolis, where the Emperor is spending some days of relaxation in his summer residence.

In the meantime, two legions, the XII Fulminata and the XV Apollinaris, are sailing to Apulia to march on Rome and seat Spartacus Albius on the Imperial throne. When the legions land, the general will personally slay the Emperor and, after taking Rome, join forces with the II and the III Legio Italica from Raetia.

In the shrine of Cumae, in the meantime, the **Sibylla** has had a terrible vision about herself, realizing her life is in danger. Theodomirus, not much further away in his villa in Capreae, has sent for the Cohors Arcana.

As Theodomirus makes his arrangements to protect the most precious prophetess of the Empire, Sibylla has a new vision, this time about the conspiracy of Spartacus Albius. Possessed by the god, she begins writing her omens on her palm leaves.

In the dark, however, watches priestess **Actia**, lifelong friend of Spartacus Albius, who has promised her the place of Sibylla after his rise to power. Actia jumps the Sibylla, pinning her to the ground, and, believing her dead and fearing being exposed, she hurries to take the palm leaves and burn them in the garden to cover her tracks. Spartacus Albius' plan is still secret, but the aggression toward the Sibylla has set in motion a series of events which, if the Custodes are successful, may lead to exposing the conspiracy and saving Emperor Theodomirus.

Note. *This adventure is set in Regio I of Italia, Latium and Campania, so the Demiurge should be familiar with its description in the first part of this volume and the with* The Magical Heart of Campania Felix *in the second.*

Adventure Average Value: 6 EP

SYNOPSIS

This adventure is made up of two parts:

PART 1: A MYSTERIOUS MURDER

The Custodes must first unravel the mystery of the attempted murder of the Sibylla, whose condition is now critical. Then, they must investigate the temple, its staff, and the crime scene, eventually making their way to the town of Cumae.

PART 2: TO HELL AND BACK

It is not just what happened to the Sibylla that requires the attention of the Custodes, however. They must also keep her alive and find a supernatural cure for her affliction. The Custodes will be forced to reach one of the most terrifying places in the Empire, the shores of fateful Lacus Avernus, said to be one of the entrances to the Underworld. If they do all of this right, not only will they save the Sibylla, but the Empire itself, by exposing a political conspiracy.

PART 1: A MYSTERIOUS MURDER

SCENE 1: A BAD START

The Custodes take a swift Imperial navy vessel for a four hour journey. If the Custodes earn the trust of Farnax, he tells them the Emperor has asked him to always be at the disposal of the Sibylla, and to leave her side only to report to the palace any Divinations about his Imperial majesty. Farnax finds Cumae a lovely residence, and, if the characters are particularly cordial, he offers comments on the local women and the oysters and fish from nearby Lucrinus Lacus.

At dawn, the Custodes reach Cumae, and soon thereafter they make their way into the cave of the Sibylla, at the feet of the town Acropolis, just below the temple of Apollo. Farnax enters the temple to summon the priestess, but soon the Custodes hear him calling for help. The Sibylla is on the ground in a pool of blood. She has fallen from her three-legged stool, from which she offers her divinations, slammed her head on the ground, and now seems to be dead. A successful **De Scientia** or **Sensibilitas** roll (DT 6), however, reveals that she is still alive, although in a deep coma and not responsive to normal medical procedures. Asking Farnax and the priestesses, or passing a **De Magia** roll (DT 6, 3 for Italic natives), the group learns of the legend of Proserpina and the Golden Bough. Proserpina, Mistress of Hades, can be convinced to let the soul of the Sibylla go in exchange for a golden branch that grows in laurel bushes in the thick grove on the banks of Lacus Avernus (if the characters follow this path, skip to Part 2 of the adventure).

THE SIBYLLA CUMANA AND THE TEMPLE

Legend has it that the Sibylla, priestess of Apollo, had from the god two gifts: immortality and foresight. Common lore is that whoever wants a response from her is led through a long hallway that feeds into her cave, where the Sibylla sits on a tall three-legged stool, the sacred tripod, enshrouded in the odorous smoke of the herbs that help her with her visions. After asking their question, the petitioner leaves, and the Sibylla, possessed by the god, writes the response on palm leaves.

In truth, the Sibylla is not immortal, but simply replaced by another priestess when she becomes too old.

The temple of Apollo on the Acropolis and the Cave of the Sibylla underneath belong to the same sacred complex. To the temple and the fifteen-foot-tall wooden effigy of the god, are assigned four priests, one of whom is Farnax, tasked with taking care of the statue, performing the sacred ablutions, decorating it with flowers at the appropriate times, and solemnly showing it to the faithful. In addition, these priests watch over the temple archive and treasure, made up of the offerings of those who come to consult the oracle.

The Sibylla is served by four priestesses. The first is **Actia**, who aspires to eventually take the Sibylla's place (see sidebar). The second is **Deoteria**, of servile origin, who could access this prestigious office only because the Sibylla herself vouched for her, and for whom she would do anything. Next is **Plotina**, a Roman patrician, destined from birth to be a Vestalis, but forced to take a place in a less prestigious organization after a series of familial scandals, and now wanting revenge by becoming Sibylla herself. (Because she and Actia have the same objective, they cannot stand each other.) The last priestess is **Pudentilla**, a young novice still in training, too scared of being banished from the order to ever do anything unorthodox.

There is also **Viniberta**, the Raetian housekeeper, who concisely and brusquely leads the twenty-four servants of the temple. Viniberta does not like to speak with strangers, and knows each priestess extremely well.

Should the characters attempt a Divination ritual on anything that may have happened or be still happening in Cumae or to the Sibylla, the overwhelming strength of the Oracle interferes with any other, making it a vain attempt. A *Speculum* ritual on the fate of the Emperor only partially works, showing Theodomirus on the ground, in a pool of blood, stabbed by a sword of Roman make.

THE CRIME SCENE

Inspecting the cave (**De Scientia** or **Ingenium**, DT 6), the group deduces that the Sibylla was most likely having a vision when she fell, the coals and the mysterious herbs being still hot and smoking. A suspicious detail (**De Magia**, DT 6) is the lack of palm leaves around the cave, neither written nor blank, when there should be a great many, and the stylus the Sibylla writes her omens on the leaves with being on the ground, just by her hand.
The characters may notice a small stack of charred leaves in a corner of the garden outside the cave. On a successful **De Natura** roll (DT 6), they recognize some of them as palm leaves, even though there are no palm trees nearby. They must be the leaves of the Sibylla, shipped from Sicilia.

At the bottom of the pile the group finds five leaves, upon which can still be read something:

1. "Lightning from far away strikes the au..."
2. "If you wish to keep his love, be far away from him for a month"
3. "Xii and xv"
4. "Yes, undoubtedly"
5. "The italic ones wait in the north"

Those leaves were burned by Actia the night she attempted to kill the Sibylla, but were not entirely consumed by the flames. One leaf alludes to the two legions about to disembark (the "XII" and the "XV"), and another to the two waiting to reinforce them ("the Italic ones wait in the north"). Former centurio Trogus (see sidebar), accomplice of Spartacus Albius, has a lightning bolt tattoed on his side, and his old legion, Legio XII Fulminata, is referenced as the "lightning from far away" striking at "the au[gustus]"), but it is not easy to understand. The other two leaves are responses for private citizens, who are not in any way connected to the conspiracy, and are included to complicate the lives of the Custodes.

THE ASPIRING SIBYLLA

Actia
Value: DV6
1 die: De Bello
2 dice: Ratio, De Corpore, De Societate, Hit Points
3 dice: De Magia, Sensibilitas
Weapons: Hidden Pugio (Damage 3)
Protections: None

Priestess Actia is slightly older than forty, and aspires to replace the old Sibylla.

SCENE 2: THE INVESTIGATION OF THE CUSTODES

The Custodes are most likely to investigate Cumae and its surroundings, looking for clues. The only places of any interest for the adventure are the tavern of Piso (the most important in town), the brothel, the town Forum, and the Acropolis.

PISO'S TAVERN

The owner's full name is Valens Piso, who served in the Legio XX Valeria Victrix, stationed on the isle of Mona in Britannia. His wife Felicitas, famous for her strips of dough garnished with four different types of cheese, helps him. The tavern also doubles as an inn, with

THE ACCOMPLICE OF SPARTACUS ALBUS AT CUMAE

Trogus (Ex Centurio of Legio XII Fulminata)
Value: DV6
1 die: Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Corpore, De Societate, Ratio
3 dice: De Bello, Hit Points
Hit Points: 18
Weapons: Gladius (Dmg 6), plus a hidden Pugio (Dmg 3)
Protections: None

Trogus was born in a village of the Alps Transilvanicae, in Dacia, near Ulpia Traiana. A former centurio of Legio XII Fulminata, he has a bolt of lightning tattooed on his left side, and is in Cumae to help Actia and watch over the conspiracy.

THE FOUR LEGIONS

Four legions, presently stationed in Asia and Raetia, are involved in the conspiracy against Emperor Theodomirus. Legio XII Fulminata and Legio XV Apollinaris have rebelled and embarked from Smyrna, headed to Apulia and then Rome. Legio II Italica and Legio III Italica, garrisoned in Raetia, wait for the fall of Rome to reinforce the XII and XV. If the Legions from the east were to fail, they would then stay in the north without compromising themselves. These storied Legions were formed in ancient times, and have proven their loyalty time and time again, or so the higher echelons of the state have believed:

- **Legio XII Fulminata** is so called because of the divine lightning bolts and torrential rains that answered the prayers of their legionaries and turned the tide during the war against the Marcomanni. Marcus Aurelius granted the legion the title of *Certa Constans* because it did not take part in the rebellion of Avidius Cassius. Its banners bear a bolt of lightning as its crest.
- **Legio XV Apollinaris** bears the name of the divine patron of Augustus, as it was his favorite legion. It was titled *Pia Fidelis* by Marcus Aurelius for not siding with Avidius Cassius in his rebellion. Its banners bear the bow of Apollo as its crest.
- **Legio II Italica**, titled *Pia*, was then retitled *Fidelis* by Septimius Severus after it pledged its support to him. Its banners bear the Mother Wolf as its crest.
- **Legio III Italica**, titled *Concors*, sided with Septimius Severus, earning its second title, *Fidelis*. Its banners bear a stork as its crest.

three guests at the moment of the arrival of the group. They are Nevius Novius, Kamertes of Rhodes, and Trogus. During the day, they are often found drinking wine mixed with hot sea water.

- **Nevius Novius**, a trader from Syracusae, is in Cumae to ask the Sibylla about delicate matters of love. He asked his question the day before the attempted murder, and now is waiting for his answer.
- **Kamertes** is a Greek sailor from Rhodes. A skilled sea captain, his luck has shifted, his vessel now decorating the bottom of the sea since an unexpected summer storm but two weeks earlier. Since then, he has spent his days drinking in the tavern, alternating between bouts of euphoria and deep depression. He often invokes divine help in the form of a new job, but does nothing to actively look for it.
- **Trogus** drinks to the army, and then to beautiful Melanto, with seven glasses, one for each letter of her name. He is an accomplice of Spartacus Albus, in Cumae to keep things under watch, but has fallen in love with the prostitute Melanto, who works in the brothel (see below). Trogus knows all the details of the coming revolt, and was told by Actia about the death of the Sibylla, so he ignores the fact that she is just in a coma.

THE BROTHEL

This is a graceful two-story building, where work three girls, Euthyche, Nefer, and Melanto, each in a small room. Frescoes above each door indicate the skills of the girls.

- **Euthyche** is young and jovial, tall and buxom. She loves the pleasures of the table.
- **Nefer** is a beautiful and shy girl from Egypt. She feels disdain for her clients, although she tries to hide it.
- **Melanto** is the most witty and humurous of the three. She is the favorite of Trogus, who often visits her, so she is aware of the lightning bolt on the side of the former centurio, and his hidden dagger.

The place is managed by greedy **Procula**, who took over after working there for over a decade.

THE ACROPOLIS

The one access from the city to the Acropolis is a road that rises from the southeast and leads to the opening of the Cave of the Sibylla. A short flight of stairs to the right of the cave leads up and into the Acropolis proper, its hills dominating the entire coast. In front of the cave is a garden, and on the extreme opposite, a building with service rooms and part of the servants' quarters.
On the upper terrace of the Acropolis towers the temple of Apollo, an elegant white marble building decorated with leaves and lyre friezes. The great temple of Jupiter is on the top.

THE FORUM

A wide square, bustling and loud, into which flows the economic and political lifeblood of the town, its southern side is an imposing tuff porch decorated with reliefs of weapons. On the Forum square are numerous *tabernae*, their ground floors shops and the first floors the houses of their owners. One can find both ordinary wares as well as precious ones, like eastern spices, Phoenician glass, and furs from the cold North. On the western side of the Forum proudly stands the Capitolium, symbol and heart of Roman power, and a temple dedicated to Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva. Closeby to the north of the Forum is a grandiose thermal building, where men and women, often with servants, come to take care of their bodies, gossip, and have romantic moments.
Wagons and horses are banned from moving in the heart of the town.

PART 2: TO HELL AND BACK

SCENE 3: TO SAVE THE SIBYLLA

Inspecting the body of the Sibylla reveals she is not dead, but in a deep coma. If the characters know the legend of Proserpina and the Golden Bough (see Scene 1), they can head to Lacus Avernus.

There are two ways to reach the lake and its supposed entrance to Hades. The fastest, but more dangerous, is a natural tunnel that leads from the southeastern part of the city and ends on the shores of the lake, although it may collapse and cannot be taken without light sources. If the players choose this path, the Demiurge rolls twice on the *Tunnel Encounters Table* (below).

The other way, easier but much longer, is crossing the city up to the Forum and taking the Via Domitiana to Puteoli, passing through the Arcus Felix, and turning right toward the lake. In this case, the Custodes make their way to the Lacus Avernus without issue.

SCENE 4: LACUS AVERNUS

Once on the banks of the lake, the sight before the group is terrifying. The forest is so thick that the sun is but a memory, and black water is incessantly bubbling and exuding sulfur clouds. The air is barely breathable, and the heat is unbearable, sapping the strength of characters wearing metal armor even faster, as they hear unnerving barking and the braying of a hunting horn in the distance.

To find the Golden Bough, the Custodes must Explore the Area (DT 9), impenetrable and stagnant, but fortunately not too large (6 successes required). If they are successful, the characters find a laurel bush with a branch of solid gold that they can take (see details on the Golden Bough on page 179). For each exploration roll, roll on the *Lacus Avernus Encounters Table*. Exploring the shores of Lacus Avernus is dangerous, the thick grove and the toxic miasma challenging even for the best trackers.

If the group finds the branch, or the Custodes have rolled 9 or more times, a figure emerges from the mist, a pale woman with a visage both beautiful and terrible, wearing a silver

TUNNEL ENCOUNTERS TABLE

Roll 1d10 whenever appropriate.

D10 Roll	Event
1-2	**Viper.** A Custos is attacked by a large viper (use the profile of Venomous Snakes, with DV4 instead of DV3).
3-4	**Lost.** The characters take the wrong bend and wander for hours. Roll 2 more times on this table.
5	**Wild Dogs.** The characters encounter (1.5:1) wild and aggressive Dogs.
6	**Collapse**. Large rocks and stones fall on the group. Each Custos must roll **Coordinatio** (DT 6) or suffer 2d6 points of damage.
7-8	**Wolves**. The characters must face (1:1) Wolves.
9	**Underground River.** The characters on the front row must roll **Sensibilitas** (DT 9) to avoid falling into the waters of an underground river. Those who fail do not drown on a successful **De Corpore** roll (DT 9).
10	**Bear**. The Custodes have inadvertently disturbed a Bear who had found shelter in the tunnel and now does not seem too happy…

LACUS AVERNUS – ENCOUNTERS TABLE

Roll 1d10 whenever appropriate.

D10 Roll	Event
1-2	**Aimless wandering.** Because of the fumes, the characters lose their bearings and wander aimlessly, passing multiple times by the same spot in which they recognize a tree or rocks.
3	**Snake.** A Custos is attacked by an unusually large Venomous Snake (DV5 instead of DV3).
4	**Boar.** The characters encounter a Boar, which attacks them immediately.
5	**Hell Hounds.** The Custodes encounter 1d3 Infernal Hounds (see sidebar), which growl viciously, but do not attack unless provoked. If the Custodes want to keep going in the direction they are headed, and at the same time avoid the Hounds, they must take another path. In that case, they may lose their bearings (see 1-2).
6	**Empusae.** The Custodes encounter (1:2) Empusae disguised as beautiful maidens, who attempt to lure them off track.
7	**Larva.** The characters encounter a Larva, the specter of somebody who came looking for the golden branch before them, to rescue the soul of his beloved wife.
8	**Abandon all hope.** The Custodes find the entrance to a tunnel. It is the entrance to the Underworld, a cave where they find Cerberus waiting for them (see page 82). The monstrous hound is chained; if the characters flee, he cannot pursue them, but the tunnel is too narrow to avoid his mass. If the characters defeat him (or find another way to move past him) and move on, they reach the banks of the River Lethe and can speak with the shadows waiting to be ferried by Charon to the other side. Among them are many legionaries, those still loyal to the Emperor from Legiones XII and XV, killed as they opposed their traitorous companions, who warn the group of the rebellion.
9	**Finally, out.** The characters find the entrance of the tunnel leading to Cumae, although they must pass an **Ingenium** or **Sensibilitas** roll (DT 9) to recognize it. If they do not, but still take it, the Custodes must roll twice on the *Tunnel Encounters Table* (only once if they already took the tunnel coming to the Lacus) before realizing they have taken the wrong way.
10	**Always higher.** The Custodes reach the top of the mountains around the lake, and see Cumae in the plain below. They will be able to make their return easier, without needing to take the tunnel again.

PROPHECIES WITHOUT THE SIBYLLA

As long the Sibylla is comatose, a female character can attempt to be possessed by Apollo to have visions in her stead on a successful **De Magia** roll (DT 15). If one of the priestesses is persuaded to intercede with the god (on a successful **Auctoritas** or **De Societate** roll, DT 6) on behalf of the group, the difficulty decreases by 1 level. If the group burns the right magical herbs on the braziers, the difficulty becomes 9. If the group does both things, it becomes 6.

If none of the priestesses intercedes with Apollo on behalf of the characters, it must be Farnax (who, however, does not provide any bonus), otherwise the prophetic attempt is not even possible.

Such a mystic trance is, in any case, extremely taxing on both body and soul, so the character undertaking the process can answer only one question, and it is limited to the future, with a dark and intricate answer. Afterwards, the character must roll **Vigor** (DT 6), and on a failure she is *Fatigued*, and her Ratio score is halved for 1d3 days.

cuirass and shrouded in black, on a dark horse with burning eyes. She is Hekate, huntress of souls, heralded by her three Infernal Hounds (see sidebar on page 221). If the characters have already found the branch and hand it to Hekate, she disappears into the mist to take it to Proserpina. Otherwise, she sets her Hounds on the characters and disappears, leering. If the characters have not found the branch, they find it within a few hours after they defeat the Hounds, and Hekate then returns to claim it.

Back in Cumae, the characters witness the gradual recovery of the Sibylla, who, fully conscious a few hours later, exposes priestess Actia as her assailant. However, she cannot say why she was attacked, for the Sibylla has her visions in a state of deep trance, as the god speaks through her mouth, so she is not aware of what is happening around her. She does not remember what she did during the trance, including what she wrote about the looming rebellious legions.

CONCLUSION

The first objective is to save the Sibylla and expose Actia, and in doing so reveal a much darker threat, the conspiracy against the Emperor organized by Spartacus Albus. If the characters follow suspicious clues, they soon realize the danger threatening the throne. Otherwise, once the Sibylla has recovered from her wounds, she reveals who attacked her, and by questioning Actia, the group pieces together her connection with Spartacus Albius and the other conspirators. Actia is not aware of all the military details, but mentions Trogus.

Because this is, at its core, an investigative adventure, the clues should be gathered through careful examination and interrogation, rather than Divination. The divine interference of the powers around the Acropolis prevents seers from asking more direct questions, so players can rely on them only for minor details. The Demiurge, then, should be careful when allowing their group to perform Divination rituals, granting somewhat useful, but not definitive, answers, and encouraging more traditional investigation methods.

Once Trogus is found, either as the "lightning from afar" or by Actia's confession, the group learns that Spartacus Albius is on his way to Capreae, and an arrest attempt can be mounted. Capturing him is definitely preferable to killing him, to learn of all the other conspirators and proceed to a righteous purge. His death is in any case enough for the rebels, now bereft of their charismatic leader, to stop. Then, to successfully complete the adventure, it is enough to turn the rebel general over to the Emperor.

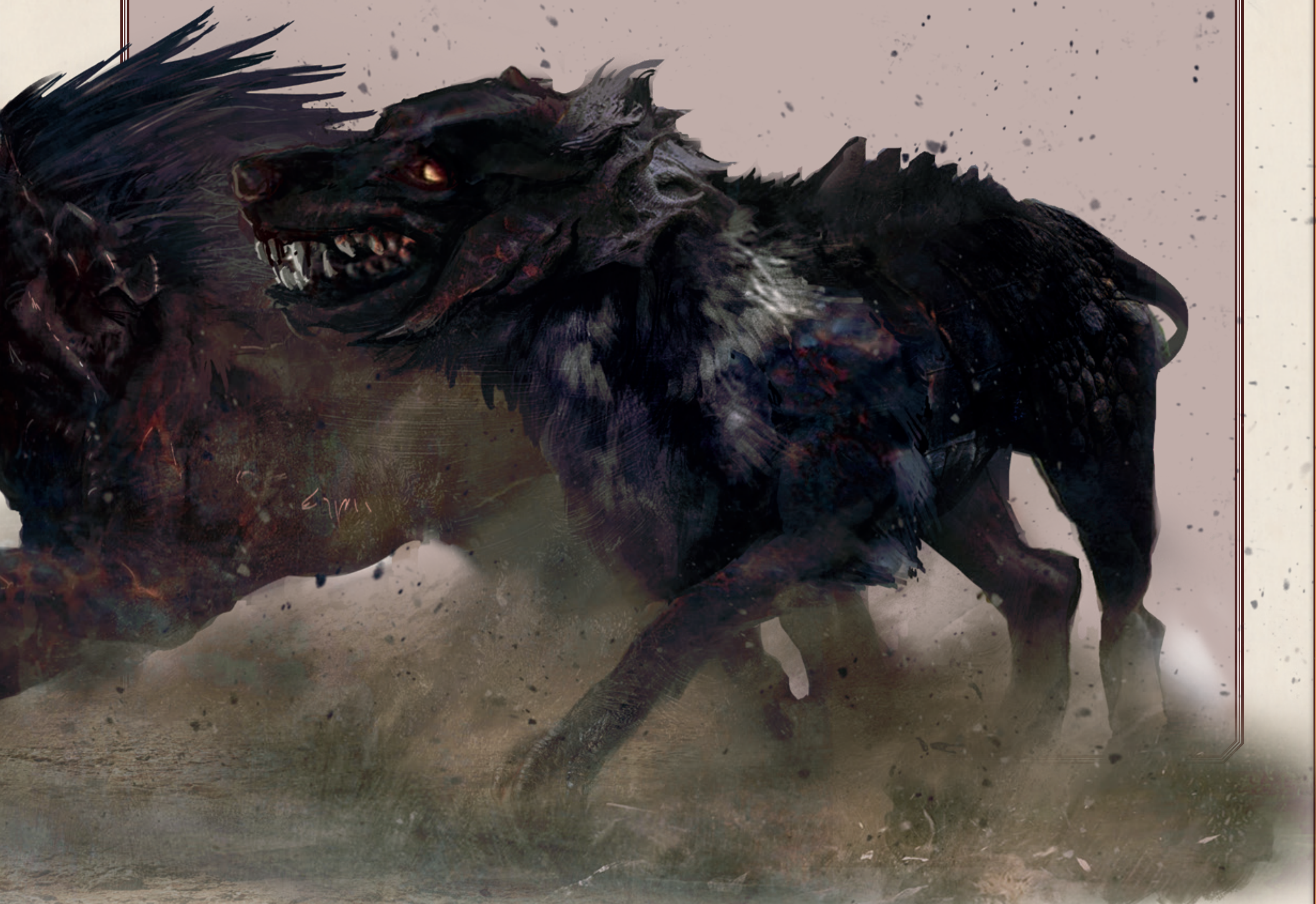
All of this must happen by the Ides of June; otherwise, Albius reaches Capreae, his legions land in Apulia, and it is too late to stop them. It is up to the Demiurge to decide whether in this case the murder of the Emperor and the rebellion are successful, or are still stopped. Either way, it is not thanks to the characters.

THE WARDENS OF LACUS AVERNUS

Infernal Hounds
Degree of Danger: 2
Size: 3
Average Value: DV8
1 die: Damage
2 dice: De Bello, Hit Points
3 dice: De Corpore, Sensibilitas
Hit Points: 16
Protections: None

- *Special Abilities:* Acute Senses
- *Magic Powers:* Terror (1DV, the victim *hears* or is *wounded* by the Hound)

Infernal Hounds are large, black, muscular dogs, often employed by the infernal gods as companions, as well as sentinels of all the entrances of the mundane world to Hades. Their purpose is to dissuade the foolish and the curious from growing too close to this fateful threshold, and so they are not immediately aggressive. They usually block the way of mortals and growl threateningly, which is often enough to scare anything away. Should the intruders persist, however, the Hounds attack, stopping if the trespassers fall back. Generally, Infernal Hounds do not pursue, unless set on somebody by a deity, to avoid being lured too far from their post. Like Cerberus (to whom they are loosely related), Infernal Hounds have a penchant for honey flatbreads, but none has ever returned to tell whether the offer of such sweets makes them any less terrifying.



LIGHTNING IN CLEAR SKIES

Maximum est elephans proximumque humanis sensibus, quippe intellectus illi est sermonis patrii et imperiorum oboedientia, officiorum quae dicere memoria, amoris et gloriae voluptas.

The elephant is the largest of all (animals), and in intelligence approaches the nearest to man. It understands the language of its country, it obeys commands, and it remembers all the duties which it has been taught. It is sensible alike of the pleasures of love and glory

(Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, **book VII, chap. 1)**

PLAYER INTRODUCTION

Moving through Augusta Taurinorum while redeployed, you take shelter at the local detachment of the Cohors Arcana. It is the morning of the third day before the Ides of September (the 10th of September), and all of a sudden, around the eighth hour (two in the afternoon) you are summoned by the Magister Auguralis, Sempronius Vinicius Balbus, to be briefed for a mission. Priscus, the priest of the shrine to Jupiter Thunderous around Forum Vibii-Caburrum, a settlement with a florid market at the feet of Mons Vesulus, the tallest peak of the Alps and the source of the nearby Padus, allegedly began spreading rumors recently. It seems the priest witnessed an omen, lightning bolts falling behind the summit of the mountain under a completely clear sky, in the night between the 2nd and the 3rd of September, and then again five nights later.

The rumor was then reported by Venerandus, one of the priests tasked by the Augurs to follow the troops exploring the surroundings of Augusta Taurinorum. He met Priscus only yesterday at the gates of Forum Vibii-Caburrum, for the regional capital is thrumming with the preparations for the official visit of Emperor Theodomirus, due on the Ides of October (15th of October). The visit is more than a whole month away, but the region is already crawling with emotions, ranging from merry excitement to mild anxiety to downright hysteria. Preparations are fervent everywhere, both openly for the celebration and covertly, for the safety of the Emperor. And these unusual bolts of lightning indicate bad omens.

Your task is to investigate these omens, understand what they mean, and determine whether things are as dire as they look for the local area. The priest who saw them, old Priscus, lives in the shrine to Jupiter Thunderous above Forum Vibii-Caburrum, and Magister Balbus hands you a sealed letter for him.

DEMIURGE INTRODUCTION

In 535 AUC, one of Rome's most dreaded enemies, the Carthaginian general Hannibal Barca, committed an incredible and unexpected deed. His true name was Hannibaal Barak, Hannibaal meaning "gift of Baal" and Barak meaning "lightning bolt", but since bolts from the heavens are a divine attribute, Barak may also mean blessed or protected by the gods. From Hispania, on foot and at the head of 50,000 troops, Hannibal crossed the Pyrenees and the Alps, the latter thought to be impassable and therefore called "the Walls of Rome", and brought war to Italia. Some of his people deserted along the way, and many men and horses died, as well as 16 of his 37 elephants, killed by treacherous terrain, privations, snow, frost, and two Gallic ambushes. Despite this, eventually Hannibal made his way to Italia at the head of his troops and repeatedly defeated the Roman legions, helped by Gallic tribes such as the Boii and the Insubri.

To cross the Alps, Hannibal passed near Mons Vesulus and climbed up to 2,000 paces (roughly 6,000 feet above sea level), setting up numerous dangerous high-altitude camps on the various plateaus on the Gallic side of the chain, the Italic one being much steeper and less habitable. During one of these stops, soon after moving through the highest pass, four of his elephants were trapped under a slide of fresh snow in a canyon near a rock wall. Their handlers barely fled with their lives, but the animals were tied to stakes and could neither be rescued nor their carcasses recovered. Shadowed by the gorge, on the colder side of the massif, snow compacted on those carcasses and became ice, preserving those large creatures from faraway lands for more than seven centuries.

In these troubled times, however, many scheme against the Empire and seek every possible resource to harm its stability. Among them, Castico, descendant of the proud Boii Gauls who have allied against Rome on multiple occasions, including the aforementioned Second Punic War, in which they sided with the Carthaginians.

Castico is part of a group of conspirators from Aemilia, affiliated with the Celtic Ring (see page 160). He has spent much time studying the deeds of his ancestors, and has even visited the plains of Cannae on a personal pilgrimage, following the journey of his ancestor Vilmetus, one of the Celts who led Hannibal through the Gallic Alps into Italia. Seeking to retrace the journey of this Vilmetus through the mountains, Castico found the four lost elephants, still encased in their frozen tomb. Utilizing his knowledge of lightning bolts, he planned to thaw and revive the elephants and turn them into a powerful symbol, as well as a great weapon, against the legionaries of Rome. Back in Forum Livii, he meticulously prepared his plan and set out with other members of the Celtic Ring, returning then to Mons Vesulus with twelve trusted and burly companions. Castico also enlisted the help of the Punic Mathos, experienced in elephants, for he worked in an exotic beast market back in his homeland, and a woman named Clorilla, who still cultivates a modicum of Celtic magic and can return animals back to life, although with beasts dead almost a thousand years before it will not be an easy feat.

The group made its way to the mountain on the first day of September, camping in the ruins of an old quarry, and then set out to extract the elephants from the ice. Castico tried numerous tricks to free the animals, first summoning the bolts of dry lightning that Priscus saw to melt the outer layer of ice. However, because they were summoned instead of natural, they definitely appeared not normal and could not be read with the Ars Fulguratoria.

Castico was successful in melting most of the ice, but he preferred not to be thorough with it so as not to damage the corpses of the animals, alternating his summonings with chisel work by his men. Three of them had even gathered wood from the plateau near the Padus Spring for a bonfire, weaker but more controllable than lightning, but an unnatural accident killed them when a large tree fell on them, pushed by a horrid giant, as sourceless, revolting cackling echoed in the vales. In truth, it was an illusion conjured by a Lympha (see page 232) to protect the area and scare the men, who, terrified, have refused to forage for more wood (though they had already found some from the Gallic side), or even move remotely close to the Italic side of the mountains.

Thawing an elephant requires roughly five days, between nightly lightning strikes and chisel work during the following day, then the carcass is left to air for a day or two, and the following day Clorilla brings it back to life with a long ritual. Her magic is powerful enough to force the hot blood of the animals to flow once again, although their flesh is still frozen. Then, the revived animal is left to graze for a few hours, to reacquaint itself with its own body, as Mathos familiarizes himself with it. Eventually, the elephants are led to the smelter, where Castico's men have erected their base camp, and the Punic fully awakens the beasts' ancient training. Castico arrays his newly-found forces to organize a rebellion of the local Celts and, with some luck, of the entire northern Italic regions, bolstered by the symbolic value of the resurgent Carthaginian elephants, in the hopes that their sudden apparition in the Roman heartland will bring many other Celtic tribes to open revolt. Castico does not know of Emperor Theodomirus' visit to Augusta Taurinorum - it is a coincidence.

Note. *This adventure is set on the border between Regiones IX (Liguria) and XI (Transpadana). The Demiurge should carefully read the descriptions of the two regions in the first part of this volume, and the* The Liguri, Pirates and Smugglers *chapter in the third part.*

Mons Vesulus is not the tallest peak of the Alps, but everybody, even the most esteemed geographers, believes it is due to the way it just stands out from the surrounding mountains and can be seen from far away into the Padan Plain.

Adventure Average Value: 8 EP

SYNOPSIS

This adventure is made up of three parts:

PART 1: AN OMEN FROM THE HEAVENS?

The Custodes are sent to investigate mysterious lightning bolts striking Mons Vesulus, a phenomenon that the wisdom of the Ars Fulguratoria does not seem to be able to explain. The group can speak with the priest who reported the omen or wait for more to fall, but they do not find any more information. Either on their own or through other omens, the group realizes that to see things through they must venture to the place where these bolts have fallen.

PART 2: CLIMBING TO THE TOP

The Custodes head to where the bolts of lightning seem to have been striking, the Spring of the Padus, under the wrathful protection of the Lympha. There is no trace of lightning, but the group finds a mysterious corpse. They have but to move on, in the same direction.

PART 3: ANCIENT ENEMIES

Two Rome-hating Celts, a Punic with a tormented life, and a dozen of their acolytes are working on a nefarious deed: excavating from the ice four of Hannibal's elephants, after seven centuries in hibernation, and reviving them, as a powerful symbol of rebellion against Rome. The Custodes now must stop this dark and maleficent machination.

PART 1: AN OMEN FROM THE HEAVENS?

SCENE 1: AT THE FOOT OF MONS VESULUS

The Custodes are headed to Forum Vibii-Caburrum, a trade settlement not far away from Mons Vesulus, the imposing mountain that rules over the plains, already visible from Augusta Taurinorum. Its peak shrouded in perennial snow, it looms ever closer as the Custodes approach their destination.

The main characteristic of Forum Vibii-Caburrum, a town bustling with trade and activity, is its rising below a sheer 540-foot-tall cliff standing tall in the tree-covered plains, truly a miniature mountain. On the top of this rock is a small shrine to Jupiter Thunderous.

The journey from Augusta Taurinorum to Forum Vibii-Caburrum is 30 miles and takes nine hours on foot, plus another half hour to ascend to the shrine to Jupiter, for a total of a whole day. If the group is using horses, it is only half that time.

MEETING PRISCUS

On the top of the hill are two edifices, not large, but of unusually good construction. At the center is the shrine to Jupiter Thunderous, built over a previous Celtic temple, and a nearby house for the priests, Priscus and two young acolytes, and their four male servants.

Old Priscus leads the small congregation and gives a warm welcome to the Custodes, thanks to the letter of Magister Sempronius Vinicius Balbus. The aging priest offers the group a hearty meal of meat, olives, and cheese, paired with good local wine, leaving them alone as they eat, and, if they so wish, proposes to house them for the night.

Priscus is a man in his sixties, affable and fatherly, much loved by the shrine staff and greatly esteemed in town. In his youth, he trained as a Fulgurator at Volsinii and now is most skilled in reading lightning bolts.

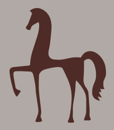
Priscus tells the Custodes that in the night between the 2nd and the 3rd of September he was on the mountain, offering periodic service to the small shrine to Jupiter Vesulius. The shrine in Caburrum has in fact the task of tending another small mountain shrine near the spring of the sacred Padus, on Mons Vesulius, near the small town of Crucibulum.

As it often happens, Priscus was going through another episode of insomnia and was having a walk outside in the fresh, clear night, under the starry sky. All of a sudden, during the vigilia secunda (just before midnight), he saw a bolt of lightning strike just behind the peak of the mountain. After ten or so minutes, another bolt came, and then a third, roughly after the same amount of time, apparently small and near to one another. He attempted to interpret them with his extensive experience with the Ars Fulguratoria, but could not make anything of them. Thinking the event to be highly unnatural, he was not successful in deducing any divine meaning, as the bolts came almost straight from high above and fell somewhere on the top of the vale.

Five nights after, at a slightly later hour, Priscus was again out of his house and saw two more bolts fall. He does not know if the phenomenon manifested at other times, not walking outside every single night, even though it has been a semi-regular occurrence in recent times.

If asked explicitly, Priscus confirms that he spoke of this with Venerandus, a priest who is an old friend of his and who he met on the 9th of September accompanying troops at the gates of Forum Vibii-Caburrum as he was returning from the shrine up above.

If the Custodes say they want to visit the sighting place, Priscus offers to pen a letter for Quintus Mannius, the priest currently in service, to welcome and house them if needed, and explains the itinerary to the group, following a long but comfortable mountain road.

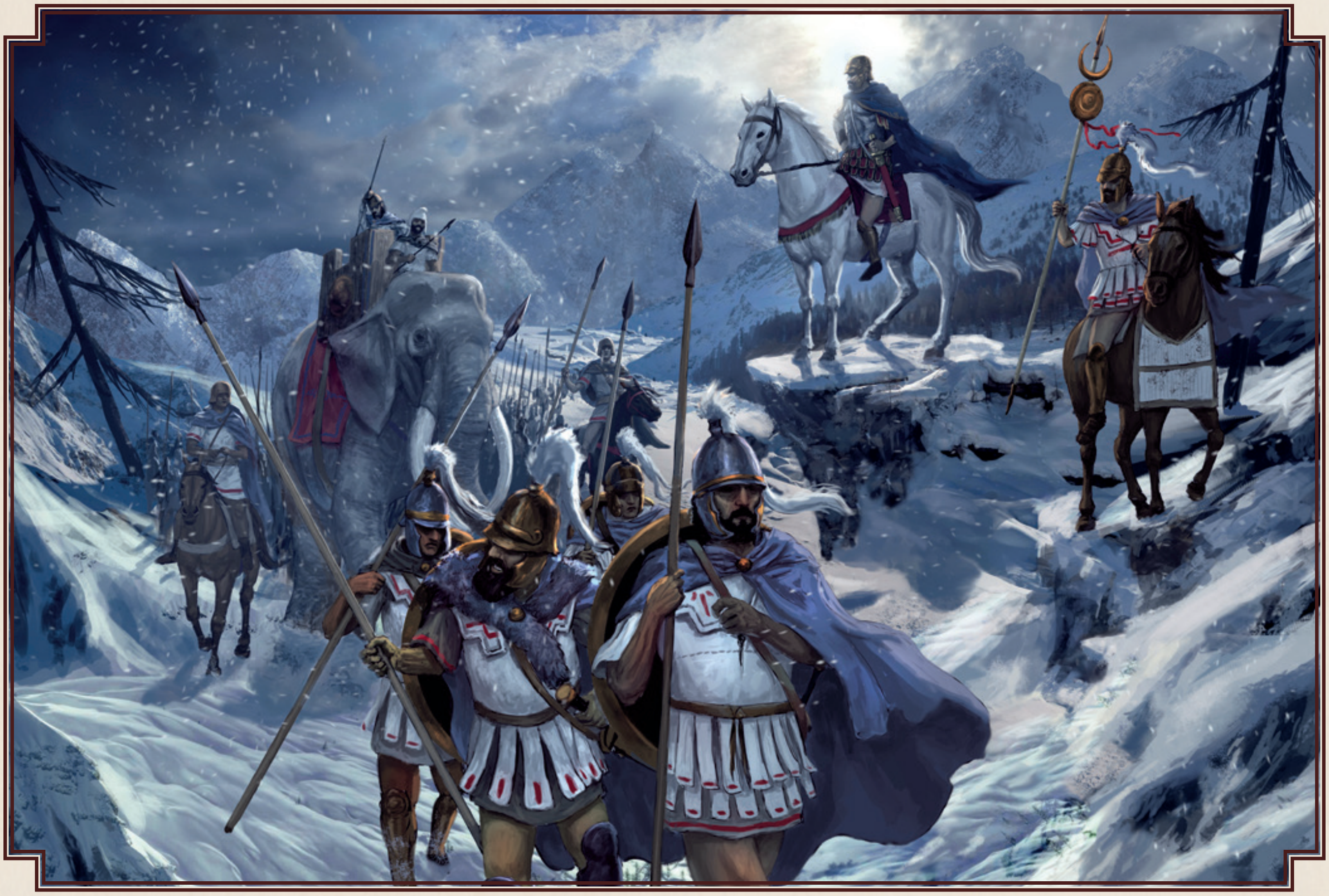


FORUM VIBII-CABURRUM

The name of Forum Vibii-Caburrum sums up all of the history of this town. In ancient times, it was named Caburrum, after the Caburriates, a Celtic tribe mentioned by Pliny among those who accepted Roman rule over the Celtic and Ligurian lands in the Vth Century AUC. Admiration for the military prowess of the Caburriates was expressed by Julius Caesar, too, who sang the praises of the sons of Caius Valerius Caburus, the Gallic prince who had obtained Roman citizenship and had consequently Romanized his own name. Caesar's deeds in the Gallic lands consolidated the Roman presence on the frontier, founding new cities or transforming the local Gallic villages into Roman villages, as in the case of Caburrum, renamed Forum Vibii in 710 AUC. Its new name was an homage to Gaius Vibius Pansa, ally and lieutenant of Caesar during the civil war against Pompeius, the true "founder" of the new settlement. It was thanks to him that Forum Vibii became an important market center, a crossroads of wares and traffics for the entire region between Augusta Taurinorum and the Alps.

If asked where the lightning bolts have struck, Priscus gives the exact location, on the northern face of the mountain, and traces a rudimentary map on a scrap of papyrus. If asked what there is of interest in the area, the aging priest says the only noteworthy sight is the spring of the Padus, a couple of hours on foot from the shrine if one knows the road. Foreigners should, however, hire the services of a local guide, as past the shrine and the nearby village, the terrain is difficult and the real mountain begins. If the Custodes ask about any local guides, Priscus recommends Salluvius, a young lad from Forum Vibii-Caburrum, whom he can have summoned by a servant. If summoned, Salluvius asks the Custodes where they are headed and offers his services for a good reward, although he does not know how to ride a horse. If the Custodes are mounted, Salluvius will have to ride with one of them.

If asked about the heavenly phenomenon, neither the acolytes nor the servants have noticed the mysterious bolts mentioned by Priscus. *"We're too far away from where he says he saw them,"* they say. It also seems neither have they heard them mentioned by the locals, as the shrine staff does not attend the town and leads quite a secluded existence. According to what they could hear in their rare visits to the town, however, nobody seems to have noticed anything unusual.



THE EXPERT GUIDE

Salluvius (Guide)
Value: DV5
1 die: De Bello
2 dice: De Corpore, De Natura (Navigation), Ratio
3 dice: De Corpore (Marching), Sensibilitas
Hit Points: 10
Weapons: Staff - Improvised Weapon (Damage 4)
Protections: None

Born in the villages on the hills around the early course of the Padus, Salluvius is in his early twenties and of Ligurian descent. He scrapes by with odd jobs and the occasional not-too-legitimate traffic that brings him beyond the Alps, into Gallia.

Salluvius is still pious and devout, the reason why Priscus heartily recommends his services, joining the Custodes with dedication. If the group is attacked, he helps defend them, but should they attack something, he does not participate.

BETWEEN HILL AND MOUNTAIN – ENCOUNTERS TABLE

Roll 1d6 when deemed relevant. Add 2 to the result if the group is past Forum Vibii-Caburrum (after Scene 1), or add 4 if it is beyond Crucibulum (Parts 2 and 3 of the adventure).
If necessary, the Demiurge can choose the episode they deem most appropriate, keeping in mind they are listed ranging from the most thematic for an urban environment, like the Padan Plain, to gradually more savage and wild.

d6 Roll	Event
1	**The local lords.** The Custodes come across a luxurious four-wheeled wagon, with beautiful drapes of precious fabrics, pulled by two white horses and followed by three mounted Mercenaries (see Core Rulebook). The driver Ursus (use the profile for Mercenaries, but unarmored and with a simple Pugio at his belt) wields a long whip he uses on both horses and bystanders, if they are not quick enough. If the Custodes do not leave the road soon enough, they are struck, too. Inside the wagon are Marcus Minucius Pollo and his wife Julia (use the profile for Landowners in the Core Rulebook), owners of a bountiful nearby estate. Arrogant and haughty, they believe they are entitled to everything because of their high status.
2	**The stabbed icon.** On a successful **Sensibilitas** roll (DT 9), the Custodes spot on the ground, near the side of the road, a palm-sized, cloth doll of a feminine figure. If they observe it, they realize it portrays a woman with long, black hair and is pierced with a large nail. If the group investigates the grim finding and its possible connections with occult rites, they learn the doll belongs to Livia, a young girl who lives in the area. After an argument with her little brother Marcus, he took the doll, stabbed it with a large hair pin and threw it away. If the Custodes ensure that the doll returns to Livia, the girl is greatly happy.
3	**A secluded couple.** Near the road, the Custodes see a young man and a young woman in a somewhat secluded corner, standing one in front of the other, their bodies almost touching, as he has his left arm on her shoulder. Evidently, the Custodes have interrupted something, and the couple waits for them to leave. Should any of the characters pass a **Sensibilitas** roll (DT 9), however, they realize there is a shadow of terror in the eyes of the girl and a silent plea for help, as the man holds a dagger behind her back. If the Custodes intervene, he threatens to kill her, and now it is for the group to find a way to solve the situation.
4	**The giant snake.** From a hole in the ground comes a viper of prodigious size (use the profile for Venomous Snakes in the Core Rulebook, but with Value DV5 and the Poisonous Breath magic power), more than seven feet long that spreads panic in any bystanders. It is much longer than average, but any who pass a **De Natura** roll (DT 3) identify it unmistakably as a viper by its triangular head and the green, irregular stripe on its back. The snake is extremely aggressive, and its bite is powerful enough to kill within an hour (for further information, see page 175 of the *Encyclopaedia Arcana*), unless somebody can find an antidote from a nearby healer.
5	**The herbs gatherer.** A young woman with a modest but well-kept air to her gathers herbs into a cloth bag at her belt. On a successful **De Natura** roll (DT 9), the group realizes she is not picking normal herbs, but human-shaped roots, the rare mandrake, used in powerful medicines (for further information, see page 163 of the *Encyclopaedia Arcana*). The woman is called Faustina and is a Savia Foemina, a healer skilled in the use of herbs (see page 158 of the *Encyclopaedia Arcana*). Discrete and on the silent side, if approached in the right way she is willing to talk of her trade and sell a potion she has stored in her nearby house, one that helps to staunch bleeding and quickens the scarring process (a vial is enough for three doses, which reduce by 1 level the difficulty of the First Aid roll against slashing damage and the like).

6	**The lonely old man.** An old man with a long, white beard and scraggly hair, wearing unkempt clothing, wanders clutching a knotted staff. Every now and then, he stops and mutters something beyond comprehension. When he sees the Custodes, however, with an inspired look he shouts at the group, *"Divine wrath is roused! Offer great sacrifices with a devout heart or ill will befall all! Offer the whitest and purest lamb!"* In truth, it is just an old, not-really-there-in-the-head, homeless man, who wanders asking for handouts and occasionally lets the ghosts in his mind loose.
7	**The voice in the wind.** The Custodes hear a voice in the rustling of the wind, saying something like, *"Higher, always higher, you shall find what you seek."* It is a Faun (see the Core Rulebook), hidden among the trees. Although he will not reveal himself willingly, the Custodes may spot him if they look hard enough, and, should the Faun remain hidden, he will follow them for a while and, if possible, will pull a cruel prank on the group.
8	**A maiden in danger.** All of a sudden, the Custodes hear feminine cries for help coming from a nearby tree, where a girl is seeking refuge from a large, angry Boar (see the Core Rulebook, but with Value DV6 and 18 Hit Points). On the ground is an upturned basket with blackberries. The girl was attacked by the animal as she was picking berries and climbed the nearest tree, now begging the Custodes to see the beast off and help her climb down. She is grateful to the Custodes if they help her, although she is just a local farmer and does not have much to offer.
9	**The master of the mountain.** The path the Custodes are on is blocked by a particularly aggressive Ibex (use the profile for Rams in the Core Rulebook), threatening a charge with its long horns. In the fight with the animal, Regina, The Queen of the Spring (see page 231) may intervene.
10	**The golden eagle.** Above their heads, the Custodes see a majestic male golden eagle (use the profile for Eagles in the Core Rulebook) with a seven-foot wingspan. If the characters climb the peak, he flies tighter and lower circles, looming ever closer. If attacked, or if the Custodes approach a rock face (or a tall tree), near the path, where his nest lies (**De Natura** roll, DT 6 to spot it), the eagle will react. In the nest are a female eagle (same profile) and a roughly three-month-old chick that has just learned to fly (Value DV3, all the characteristics at 1 die, Hit Points 1). The female eagle, too, attacks the Custodes if they get too close or attack the male. If the Custodes look like they are leaving, the eagles do not attack them or do not keep it up if they already have already attacked. In the fight with these animals, Regina, The Queen of the Spring (see page 231) may intervene.

SCENE 2: THE SHRINE TO JUPITER VESULIUS

The shrine to Jupiter Vesulius is on the top of the narrow vale dug throughout the millennia by the small river called Padus, which further down in the plains becomes the largest in Italia. The sacred building rises near a mountain town called Crucibulum ("Crucible"), six and a half hours on foot from Forum Vibii-Caburrum.

Out of Forum Vibii-Caburrum, one must cover roughly 5 miles of plains to the first hills for an hour and a half on foot, then the road moves through the hills along the Padus and exits halfway into its vale from the northeast, right at the town of Vicana (7 more miles to move through the highlands, a couple of hours on foot). From there, an ever-steeper road follows the course of the river for 11 miles, snaking through fields and groves with some isolated farms (three hours to climb up, two and a quarter to climb down). Once in sight of Crucibulum, the group is presented with a fork, a secondary road separating from the main one to climb to a plateau in the mountains, leading to the shrine to Jupiter Vesulius.

A MOUNTAIN SHRINE

In the middle of a meadow ending on a sheer cliff and a wonderful vista of the vale and the surrounding mountains is a small but well-kept shrine. In the triangular pediment, a central sculpture portrays Jupiter sat on a throne in front of Mons Olympus, bearing a striking resemblance to Mons Vesulus. To the left is a small cluster of sculptures with child Jupiter and a Faun, fed by the goat Amalthea, while to the right another group shows Juno and Minerva, respectively the wife and daughter of Jupiter.

In front of the shrine is a meadow surrounded by a grove. On one side is a low building with lodgings for the priest, servants, and any guests. Near the building are a small orchard and a series of beehives that provide for the necessities of the small community.

ASKING ABOUT LIGHTNING

The priests living in the shrine to Jupiter Thunderous in Forum Vibii-Caburrus take turns leading this shrine, their sacred service lasting a month at a time. Currently here are the current acting priest, young Quintus Mannius, who took over for old Priscus on the 8th of September, and the two servants carrying out the menial tasks.

If asked about the mysterious bolts mentioned by Priscus, Mannius did not see them. *"I have not been here for long, I was not here in Priscus' time. And, well, I sleep at night... anyway, I have not seen these phenomena."*

The servants, too, know nothing of unnatural lightning bolts or the like. If the Custodes insist (**Auctoritas** or **De Societate** roll, DT 6) the bolder of the two grumbles something along the lines of, *"It may be his age, but sometimes his observations of the night sky become dream interpretation sessions."*

AWAITING THE BOLTS

If the Custodes choose to stay and observe, they can spend the night in the meadow in front of the shrine waiting for new bolts to fall. They see new ones every five nights, usually around midnight, if the plans of Castico have not been disturbed.

During the first night of waiting, if the Custodes did not warn the shrine staff, about an hour before midnight they see a cloaked human figure leaving the building, carrying something under their arm and moving carefully in the moonlight. They also bear a lantern, but light it only when some distance away from the building. If left alone, they fade towards the road and then return after a couple hours to turn the lantern off and furtively enter the building. He is one of the shrine servants, Probus, who if stopped as he is leaving from the shrine, under his cloak bears a small amphora of good local honey he occasionally steals to smuggle it to a trader who waits at night in Crucibulum, where he comes often to stock the locals with goods from the plains. If searched on his way back from Crucibulum, Probus has a sack of coins at his belt he claims to own, but of which he does not specify the origin.

In the nights when new bolts fall (the one between the 12th and the 13th of September and between the 17th and the 18th), the Custodes mounting watch in the meadows see two bolts, one ten minutes after the other, not very large and possibly falling a few miles to the west, somewhere on the peak of the vale they are in at that moment.

The Custodes can attempt to interpret the bolts (see *Ars Fulguratoria* on page 75 of the Core Rulebook and *The Ars Fulguratoria* section of the *The Etrusca Disciplina* chapter in the second part of this volume), but not even a successful **De Magia** roll yields any useful information. If the roll obtains at least a III Degree of Success, the Custodes realize these bolts of lightning are neither natural nor sent by the gods, but summoned by a mortal through a ritual.

SCENE 3: AN OMEN IN A DREAM

If the Custodes perform a Precognition ritual for direction, they see Mons Vesulus struck on an unspecified spot on its side by a bolt of lightning and themselves pointing that spot out to one another before moving to it. The omen is clear: they must head to the mountain, where the lightning strikes.

An Auspicium ritual, too, brings birds to point to a specific direction.

If the Custodes tarry for more than four days from their inclusion in the investigation or decide to return to Augusta Taurinorum, the same vision is granted to the character with the highest **De Magia** score in the group. Should more Custodes have the same score, the vision is shown to the one with the highest **Sensibilitas** score among them. If that is a draw, too, determine the Custos randomly.

SCENE 4: THE LAST BULWARK OF CIVILIZATION

Returning from the shrine to Jupiter Vesulius, in the Padus vale along the road they took to get there and moving on to the spring is the mountain town of Crucibulum. Its people are simple and poor folk, living off the woods, their orchards dug into the flanks of the hills, and their small goat herds. A woodworker, a smith, and a clay maker provide most necessity goods.

If the Custodes ask about the history of the town's name, they are told that in the past smiths were more numerous when the area still yielded copious amounts of ores to smelt, but it has been decades since the veins have been depleted. On a successful **De Societate** roll (DT 6), the Custodes can be directed to the old mines and the smelter.

INVESTIGATING LIGHTNING

If the Custodes ask about the bolts of lightning, most of the locals have not noticed anything. If they insist, eventually the group finds a woman who claims to have seen bright lights a few nights before, but paid not much mind to it. It happens sometimes, when storms are far away. She was wide awake in her bed and noticed light filtering through the wooden blinds, although they were closed and she could not see what was actually happening.

PREPARING TO MOVE ON

Beyond the town, numerous paths climb ever higher into the mountains. If the Custodes ask directions to the spring of the river, they are pointed to a winding path, although they are also told it is a difficult one, and reaching the spring is impossible for somebody who is not a local. If the group does not have a guide already, they should hire one now.

If the Custodes do not have a guide and ask who can they hire, they are recommended Vernanus (see sidebar), a thin and tough young lad, used to wandering about the mountains. In alternative, if the Custodes are employing the services of other characters, the Demiurge can use the profile for Guides in the Core Rulebook.

A BRUSQUE COUNSEL

A goatherd, Bavius, a young and burly man (use the profile for Farmers and Shepherds in the Core Rulebook), gives a blunt warning to the Custodes: *"Respect nature, up there in the mountains."* He is not hostile per se, just a no-nonsense and brisk countryman who spends much time alone. If asked to explain in an equally blunt tone, Bavius simply shrugs, and if faced with insistence he could even start a brawl, with other locals intervening on his behalf. If, instead, an explanation is asked in the right tone, the man says that the couple of times he tried to take twigs from a bush or inadvertently smashed mushrooms with his walking stick, he was almost crushed by falling rocks, giving him the feeling that some supernatural entity watches over the groves. If offered to be hired as a guide, Bavius declines.

ONWARD!

Without a guide, it is functionally impossible to find the right path. Whether they already have one or find it here, the Custodes eventually must hire one before they can move on. Neither Vernanus nor other guides know how to ride a horse, suggesting going on foot for the sake of the animals, too. Salluvius himself, should the Custodes have hired him at the shrine, suggests leaving any horses in the care of a few local families he trusts.

If the Custodes are mounted and insist on proceeding that way instead of leaving the animals in town, the guide will ride with one of them, and the beast will tire much faster. At a third and then again at two thirds of the way, the Custos carrying the guide on their horse must pass a **De Natura** roll (DT 6, DT 9 at night) to avoid injuring the horse. The other riders, to avoid the same fate to their mounts, must pass a **De Natura** roll (DT 6, DT 9 at night) two thirds of the journey in.

THE MOUNTAIN LIGURIAN

Vernanus (Guide)
Value: DV5
1 die: De Bello, Ratio
2 dice: De Corpore, De Natura, Hit Points, Sensibilitas
3 dice: De Corpore (Marching)
Hit Points: 10
Weapons: Staff - Improvised Weapon (Damage 4)
Protections: None

Born and bred in Crucibulum, Vernanus knows the area and the paths leading to Gallia well.

He agrees to go with the Custodes to guide them through the hard corners of the land, but he is not a mercenary. If fighting breaks out, he fights only if attacked and falls back to a safer position until combat is over. He is paid to lead people through, not risk his life.

PART 2: CLIMBING TO THE TOP

SCENE 5: THE LIGURIAN BAND

An hour and a half on foot from the town, past the first plateau, the Custodes take a narrow path and meet a group (1:1) of men (use the profile for Guides in the Core Rulebook) traveling in the opposite direction, to the plains. Two of them carry sacks on their shoulders, and all seem on edge. A successful **Sensibilitas** roll (DT 6) makes the group notice that these people move quite slowly, one of them in particular proceeding almost as if he had eggs or something equally fragile in his sack. With a II Degree of Success, the Custodes spot weapon-like bulges on their belts (each has a hidden Pugio). They try to keep their distance from the Custodes, although the narrow space does not allow for much.

They are Ligurian smugglers returning from Gallia, and are carrying two carefully-wrapped druidic sickles, one gold and the other silver, requested by a wealthy Bergomum landowner. The other sack contains a well-padded and cloth-wrapped box with two vials of a mysterious liquid, kept in place by a wooden frame. The liquid is mistletoe syrup, sold for tens of thousands of sestertii, that the group is smuggling to avoid taxes (see pages 83 and 84 of the *Encyclopaedia Arcana* for more information). Each vial contains ten doses that can be used as an antidote for poisons and cure infertility, both for humans and animals (for further information, see page 166 of the *Encyclopaedia Arcana*).

If the Custodes let the group through, nothing happens. However, the smugglers are on edge and ready to pounce on the Custodes at the barest hint of a threat, the one with the vials the only one who will avoid combat, unless he has deposited his sack somewhere safe.

Should the Custodes confiscate their precious wares, they would be required to turn them in to the authorities or their superiors.

SCENE 6: THE SPRING OF THE PADUS

The Custodes arrive at a second, smaller plateau dotted with pine trees, with a brook rustling by, the origin of the river they have followed on their way up. It flows from a spring beneath two large stones, and the pines around it are less thick, while in other parts of the plateau they form two small groves. The Celts call them "pades", hence the origin of the word Padus.

If the Custodes, here or anywhere else, look for signs of lightning strikes, they should roll **Sensibilitas** (DT 12, DT 15 at night). Whatever the result, they find none.

THE SHRINE TO FATHER PADUS

To the side of the spring is a small and simple stone shrine, without ornaments but carved with the words "Pado Patri", "To Father Padus". It looks like a normal Roman shrine, built by Roman priests and still the site of occasional sacrifices.

If the Custodes ask their guide if there are local Padus cults, he does not have much to say, commenting that the Liguri call the Padus *Bodincum*, "bottomless", after its depths in the plains, but do not worship it specifically.

A SMALL BUT INSIDIOUS CREATURE

Should the Custodes investigate for any reason the plants, rocks, or grass around them, they would find a Salamander (see sidebar), with the risk of touching it. This specific Salamander is particular because, instead of having spots, it is black, with glossy skin and a tail ending in a soft point.

Even if the group does not investigate, but simply spends time in the area, the creature appears anyway and may be noticed by the group on a successful **Sensibilitas** roll (DT 6, DT 12 at night) before accidentally touching it.

There are multiple Salamanders in the area, forming a small colony on the spring plateau.

A SURPRISINGLY SMALL CREATURE

Vesulian Salamanders
*Degree of Danger:*1
Size: 1
Average Value: DV4
1 die: Damage, Hit Points
2 dice: Sensibilitas
3 dice: De Bello, De Corpore
Hit Points: 4
Protections: None

- *Special Abilities:* Poison* (2DV, the victim is *touched* by the creature)
- *Magic Powers:* Invulnerability (to fire)

** It is not necessary for the Salamander to deal damage to inject its Poison, just to touch its victim. The* Poisoned *victim temporarily loses Ratio score instead of Hit Points (the Poison is resisted with* ***Ratio*** *instead of* ***Vigor****). As long as they are under the effect of the Poison, their perception of reality is distorted (they see their companions with distorted faces, hear voices in the air, etc.) and the DT of all De Corpore, De Natura, De Scientia, and De Societate rolls is increased by 1 level.*

This is a Salamander variety unique to the Spring of the Padus. Similar to the normal Salamander (see page 207), it is mainly distinguished from it by its entirely black skin, its soft-tipped tail, and the different effect of its poison.

Contact with the saliva of this creature only alters perception of reality, hallucinations that Regina (see page 232), the Lympha who protects the spring, harnesses in addition to her own magical might to prevent damage to her groves.

A RECENT DECEASED

Crows caw on top of nearby pine trees. If the Custodes approach, as the crows fly away they spot the corpse of a man, face down, arms wide open, his head caved in by a tree that fell on top of him. A felling axe lays on the ground right next to his right hand, and the whole body is pierced and torn by beaks.

A successful **De Natura** roll (DT 6) reveals that the fallen tree is healthy, almost as if it had uprooted itself and crashed on the poor fellow, but without an apparent reason. Many of its roots are still in the ground, and it is still living, as its branches follow sunlight.

The man wears heavy clothing and, as revealed on a successful **Sensibilitas** roll (DT 6), probably had attacked a nearby tree with his axe.

Should the Custodes touch the corpse, they might accidentally come into contact with a Salamander (see sidebar on page 230).

The corpse wears at his belt four leather loops with iron hooks, revealed on a successful **De Scientia** roll (DT 9), to be attached to footwear to walk on ice without slipping. On a successful **De Societate** roll (DT 12), examining the face of the corpse yields that this man is not a local, probably hailing from the coasts of the Adriatic Sea.

THE GUARDIAN OF THE PADUS

Regina

Regina is a Lympha (see page 232; she has capabilities 1 and 4), an Italic water nymph, and the guardian of the River Padus, the king of the Italic rivers, along its entire course from the mountain spring to its great delta on the Mare Adriaticus. Regina can appear in any Italic region crossed by the river, often answering the summons of the creatures that live along the Padus' banks or in its waters, bringing untold dread to any who defile the nature under her care. She can conjure terrifying illusions, as well as intervene with her own supernatural might and, like all Lymphae, she is also invisible in water.

Regina keeps the spring under special surveillance, as at that point the river is like a fragile newborn and requires greater protection. However, she loves playing hide-and-seek in the misty and enchanted lagoons of the delta, where the course of the river splits, mixing its waters with the sea, making Regina one of the few Lymphae capable of swimming in salt water without issue.

A Retrocognition ritual reveals the woodsman approaching the tree with two companions. One of them points at something in front of him and shouts, *"A giant... A giant!"* The other two look and are caught by panic, although there is no giant to be seen. The tree smashes onto the terrified woodsman while his companions flee. A II Degree of Success in the ritual allows the Custodes to sense that behind a tree trunk a maiden observes them: Regina (see sidebar).

Examining surrounding tracks with a **De Natura** roll (DT 6, DT 12 at night), the group finds, in the mud further up on the mountain, the footprints of three men walking down and two running back up.

THE PATH TO THE PASS

If the Custodes ask the guide about what is beyond the spring, he says there is a steep pass that leads to Gallia that the locals call the Collis Travertisaepe (the Peak That Often Changes), according to some because it often causes landslides, and to others because its weather changes frequently into sudden storms. The local Liguri avoid it and use the much easier Collis Agni (Lamb's Peak) in another vale to the south, if they have business in Gallia, using the Collis Travertisaepe only for dealings of a nature that should not be observed by indiscreet eyes.

The pass is roughly a good three hours of climbing away with an expert local guide, and too steep for horses.

THE QUEEN OF THE SPRING

In the thickest pine grove of this plateau lives Regina, an Italic water Nymph (see page 232 and sidebar), whose duty it is to protect the sacred spring of the king of Italic rivers. She stays hidden, although she could decide to seduce a male (and particularly handsome) Custos if she has the chance to be seen by him but not the others. In that case, she would peek from behind a tree, put a finger to her lips to invite the character to silence, and beckon him in, to lead him into the thick of the grove, activating her Enchantment magic power to subjugate the Custos.

The Lympha attacks the Custodes if they do not show nature the proper respect or if they threaten, attack, or kill the crows or a Salamander unprovoked and not in self-defense. Regina intervenes openly or through illusions, as she did with the dead woodsman she collapsed the pine tree upon as he was trying to light a fire to thaw the glacier.

LYMPHAE

Lymphae
Degree of Danger: 1 (3 against male characters)
Size: 3
Value: DV8
1 die: De Bello, Hit Points, Ratio
2 dice: De Corpore
3 dice: De Natura, Sensibilitas
Hit Points: 8
Weapons: None
Protections: None

- *Magic Powers:* Enchantment* (3DV, only against male characters; the victim see the creature), Fate Roll, Healing, Illusion* (2DV), Prophecy, Unnatural Speed when in water (simulating invisibility in water)

** Like Nymphs (see the Core Rulebook), these powers are the only weapons of the Lymphae, and they do not have a Damage rating.*

Every Lympha exerts a special form of control over the territory crossed by her river, up to 300 feet from the banks, including each of them having two of the following capabilities:

- Causing plants to suddenly grow, wither, or relocate;
- Causing a tidal wave or whirlpool in the water;
- Conjuring a dense fog, rain, or wind;
- Summoning animals that live nearby and having them perform basic guard duties.

Being tied to rivers and lakes, Lymphae generally do not like salt water, as it gives them itching and other minor irritations, so they tend to avoid it unless they have solid reasons.

PART 3: ANCIENT ENEMIES

SCENE 7: TO THE YOKE

Moving beyond the plateau, the terrain becomes difficult, with some stretches too narrow, uneven, or almost invisible for horses. The guide takes the group along a path only they know for 700 or so paces in altitude, almost up to the pass.

THE PATH TAKEN

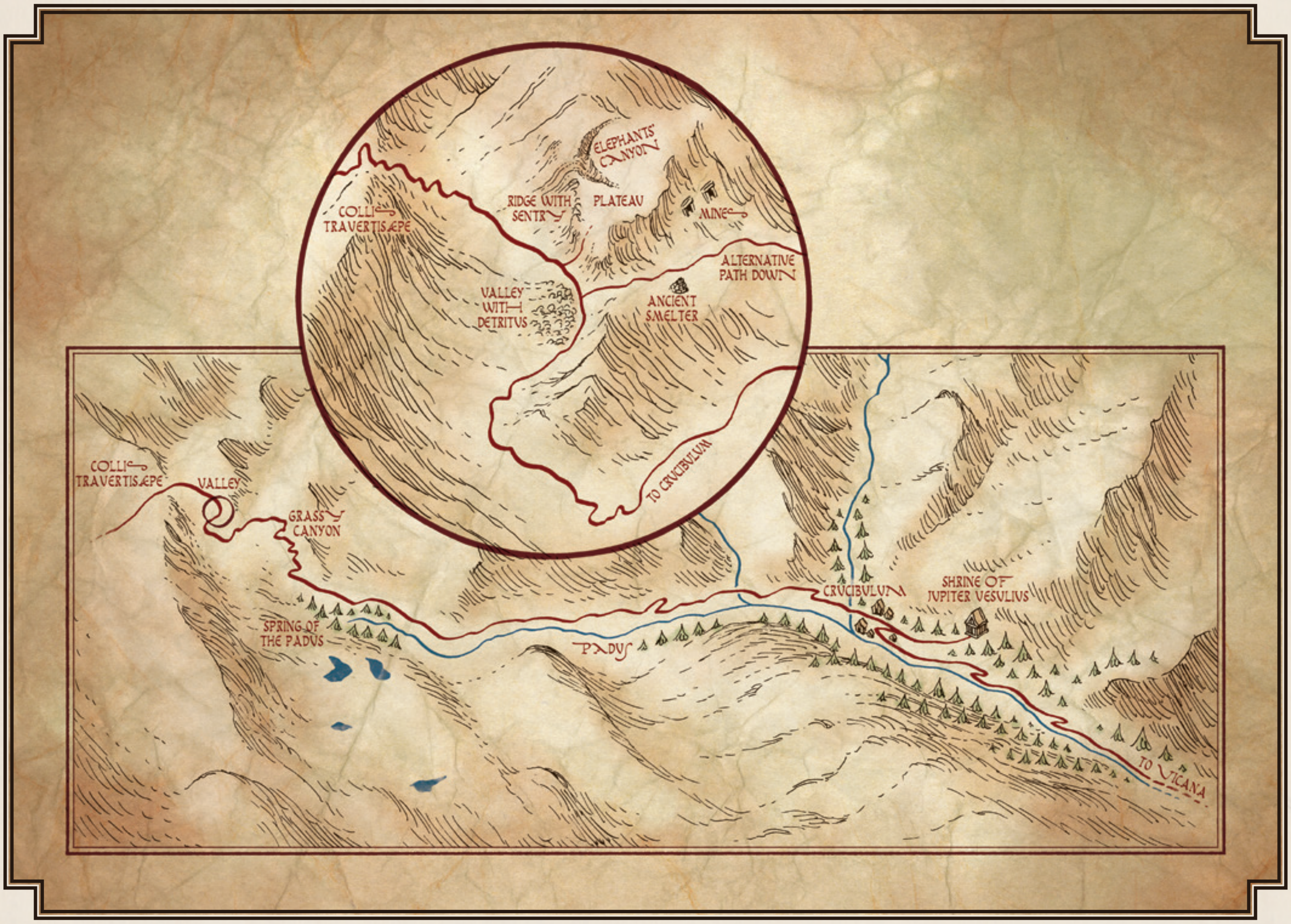
At first, the group is led to a grassy canyon, climbing up to a panoramic plateau after another hour and a half. Pines have stopped growing many tens of feet below, and the temperature is beginning to drop (especially at sundown). Half buried in the ground, the Custodes can find (**Sensibilitas** roll, DT 9) an ancient helmet in very bad shape (**De Scientia** roll, DT 9 to identify it as Carthaginian). A Retrocognition ritual here shows a camp with thousands of men and horses, and a few elephants, dressed in archaic uniforms and wielding exotic weapons. They are Hannibal's forces.

From here, the group climbs diagonally over a ridge, zigzagging to a valley full of detritus after forty-five or so minutes. Not even here does the group find signs of the fall of lightning bolts.

In this indentation in the terrain is a somewhat flat path where, on a successful **De Natura** roll (DT 9, DT 15 at night), each of the Custodes notices fresh tracks of some large animal. On another successful roll, the group realizes it must be a heavy beast, too, with large, flat feet and rounded nails (a III Degree of Success allows the character to recognize the footprints of an elephant). If the Custodes fail, the Demiurge should roll for the guide.

Having identified the tracks, on a successful **De Natura** roll (DT 6, DT 12 at night) the group realizes that (depending on how many elephants were awakened up until that moment), they are roughly headed from a pass in the ridge (see Scene 8), and after following the main path down for a while they enter a small side valley (see Scene 9). These are the two places where Castico's group is working (for a clearer picture of which of Castico's people is working where, see the sidebar *The Situation at the Collis Travertisaepe* on page 235).

Whether the tracks were found or not, during the day (not at night) a successful **Sensibilitas** roll (DT 12) can make the group notice somebody peeking at them from the ridge, only to flee immediately.


ELEPHANTS' CANYON
COLLIS TRAVERTISÆPE
RIDGE WITH SENTRY
PLATEAU
MINE
ALTERNATIVE PATH DOWN
VALLEY WITH DETRITUS
ANCIENT SMELTER
TO CRUCIBULUM
COLLIS TRAVERTISÆPE
VALLEY
GRASS CANYON
CRUCIBULUM
SHRINE OF JUPITER VESULIUS
SPRING OF THE PADUS
PADUS
TO VICANA

HANNIBAL'S MARCH THROUGH THE ALPS

The path actually followed by Hannibal through the Alps has been for the longest time the subject of speculation, because the ancient sources are imprecise or in conflict with one another. The historian Cornelius Nepos claims the expedition passed through the Val d'Isère headed to the Alpis Graia pass, there mentioned under the name of *Saltus Graius*. Titus Livius agrees that initially Hannibal took that vale, but according to him, the Carthaginian general then changed direction, headed south and rather followed the vale of the Durance River, as it would have allowed him to pass the mountains from a more comfortable, though unspecified, side. Hannibal, then, may have taken the Monginevro, 6,000 feet above sea level, as it is quite the comfortable pass, one that Rome would later turn into an actual road, the Via Domizia. Another possible pass is the Colle dell'Autaret, leading to the Lanzo vales.

Recently, however, the discovery of new elements, especially a large deposit of manure at high altitude that seems to date back to the time of Hannibal, are changing our perception of things. It may prove that Hannibal took the Colle delle Traversette, a pass at a much higher altitude than imagined, roughly 10,000 feet, on the border between the Valle del Guil, in Gallia and the Padus Valley, in Italia.

CLIMBING TO THE COLLIS TRAVERTISAEPE

If the group ignores the tracks and does not notice the sentry, they can access the basin via a harsher path, and in forty-five more minutes reach the Collis Travertisaepe. In the last segment, the Custodes must move through a landslide, which caused a 20-foot-wide chasm. To not fall off, the group must pass a **De Corpore** roll (DT 9, 6 if the group has hired a guide). If somebody falls, they impact on the side of the mountain and suffer 2d6 points of damage, but can roll **De Corpore** to halve the damage. If they have and use ropes, it takes them roughly an hour to move through the obstacle, but the DT is reduced to 6.

On the other side of the pass, on the opposite face, the descent is easier than on the Padan Plain side, the narrow path snaking down to Gallia visible only to the expert eyes of the guide. However, there is nothing of actual use to the Custodes.

SCENE 8: THE GORGE THAT DEVOURED THE ELEPHANTS

Beyond the ridge dominating the basin and the path, invisible to those climbing the path, the elephants of Hannibal that Castico is trying to free have slumbered for centuries. They are at the entrance of a long trench, in front of a natural plateau the Punic leader had camped on.

HEADS DOWN!

A small pass cuts through the ridge dominating on one side the path the Custodes are on and on the other the plateau at the mouth of the trench. Here is usually posted a sentry (use the profile for Brigands in the Core Rulebook). During the day, the sentry is capable of spotting the Custodes from afar as they ascend, while at night only when they are much closer.

The sentry is always present during the day, alone; the others are all working in the plateau but are ready to intervene if summoned. At night, the sentry is stationed only when an elephant has been freed and waits on the grass (see the sidebar *The Situation at the Collis Travertisaepe* on page 235), with two more companions sleeping nearby, easily awakened. The group is not expecting to be disturbed, so their sentries are there to keep away occasional intruders or wild animals.

If the Custodes move close, the sentry tries to convince them that the path ahead has collapsed and that they should turn back. If he cannot for any reason, he threatens them or attacks them with his Sling. If the Custodes move in anyway, the sentry fights to prevent them, shouting to raise the alarm, but if he sees too much opposition he flees before being killed.

The ridge descends onto a plateau, on which opens a trench that leads downward along the mountain.

AT THE FEET OF THE GLACIER

The plateau beyond the ridge is rare in the mountains, perhaps the highest in the ascent from Italia to the Collis Travertisaepe. It was one of the various camps used by Hannibal's army and is where Castico and his men now work.

It is accessed by a steep gorge, where the four elephants of Hannibal were sheltered when they were buried under snow, turning in time into a glacier that still clutches many of them in its grasp. By the 10th of September, when this adventure began, one animal had already been freed, so the glacier still held three more, which were then released on the 11th, the 16th, and the 21st (see the sidebar *The Situation at the Collis Travertisaepe* on page 235). In the three days following its excavation, the elephant lies on the ground, where it spent its last 700 years, but with no more ice around it, waiting to be magically revived.

Here, too, Retrocognition shows the camp and the moment of the slide, as the elephants were buried.

Usually, during the day Castico himself is on the glacier, working with eight more people to free a new elephant. Three or four men are fitted with iron-hooked footwear, similar to the ones found on the corpse at the spring of the Padus, to better climb on the ice and work without falling off.

Occasionally, (on the 14th, the 19th, and the 24th of September) Clorilla and Mathos are present, too, to awaken the elephant and lead it away. If the Custodes arrive when this has just happened and the elephant is still there, it is weaker and sluggish (35 Hit Points), does not obey commands, and fights only in self-preservation.

The plateau is covered in grass that is dry and coarse, but still green and tall enough. On one side, a relatively fresh haystack and a pile of apples that Castico's men brought there at great effort from the Gallic side, after their botched expedition at the spring of the Padus and the death of their companion. Alongside the local grass, the hay and apples are the first meal of the revived elephants. Water is sourced from a small river flowing from the mountain, at times enhanced by the ice Castico and his men have been melting.

If the Custodes break into the plateau, Castico and his people are hostile to them. The workers ditch their climbing gear, retrieve their weapons (Scramasaxes and Slings), and attack the intruders. If, instead, they are caught by surprise, they do not waste time grabbing actual weapons and fight with the hammers and chisels they use to work (improvised weapons, Damage 4).

Castico is willing to fight to the death, and can also summon lightning to strike at the Custodes, although he can do so only once every ten minutes, up to three times each day, and at the cost of great effort. His men are much less willing to die for the cause, and if things are starting to turn for the worse they, including Clorilla and Mathos, try to find shelter at the old smelter (see below) or even beyond.

However, the only exit to the plateau is through the ridge pass. During the night, if there is an elephant on the grass, three sentries are stationed on the ridge, and at midnight on the 12th and the 17th, in the middle of the plateau, Castico is calling bolts from the heavens to melt the ice, directing them to where the elephant he wants to free is. If there are no elephants in the meadow, the plateau is deserted at night.

From the 22nd of September on, there are no more elephants trapped in the ice, so the workers stay at the old smelter even during the day, while three of them are always stationed at the ridge until the last elephant is revived and led away.

From the afternoon of the 24th of September onward, the place is completely abandoned. Evidence of the work is visible, such as elephant footprints, hay and apples leftovers, and manure left by the beasts.

THE SITUATION AT THE COLLIS TRAVERTISAEPE

Castico's expedition was originally made up of 15 people, including him. Now they are 14.

The two most important figures after him are Clorilla, who knows some druidic magic, and Mathos, a Punic man with experience in the handling of elephants. Then, there are eleven men from all over Aemilia (use the profile for Brigands in the Core Rulebook), sympathizers with the Celtic cause, but not particularly devoted, hardy workers, and occasionally capable of holding their own in a fight. A twelfth died in the first days they spent there as he was trying to gather wood near the Spring of the Padus (see Scene 6).

Castico and his people have been fast at work to free the four elephants, Dherbal, Mahar, Himilk, and Gersak (although no human being knows their names anymore), and return them to life, so the situation that the Custodes find before reaching the pass changes almost every day.

Depending on the moment in which they arrive, the following table provides details as to what is happening to the men and animals.

Including the one Castico's men are chiseling away at, the elephants, barely visible, trapped in the glacier are three until the 12th of September, two until the 17th, only one until the 22nd, and then none.

Date	Event
11th of September	*Day* – Men are chiseling away to free the elephant Mahar. The shapes of two more elephants, Himilk and Gersak, can be seen inside the ice. *Night* – No sentry is on the ridge, as all are asleep at the old smelter.
12th of September	*Day* – Chiseling ice away until the afternoon, Castico's men free Mahar from the ice. The shapes of two more elephants, Himilk and Gersak, can be seen inside the ice. *Night* – Castico summons two more bolts. Three sentries are on the ridge to prevent damage to Mahar or the disturbing of the ritual, while the others sleep at the old smelter.
13th of September	*Day* – The elephant Mahar, still frozen, lies on the ground right by the ice. The men keep chiseling to free the second elephant, Himilk. The third one, Gersak, is barely visible in the ice. *Night* – Three sentries are on the ridge, while the others sleep at the old smelter.

14th of September	*Day* – The men are toiling to free another elephant, Himilk. Another elephant, Gersak, is barely visible through the ice. The elephant Mahar is still frozen, but in the late morning Clorilla begins a two-hour-long ritual, at the end of which the beast is revived and stands up. She caresses and soothes the animal, letting it graze for a few hours as she speaks to Mathos. Right before sundown, Clorilla and Mathos lead the animal to the old smelter. *Night* - No sentry is on the ridge, all are asleep at the old smelter.
15th and 16th of September	*Day* – Castico's men are working to free Himilk. Another elephant, Gersak, is barely visible inside the ice. *Night* – No sentry is on the ridge, as all are asleep at the old smelter.
17th of September	*Day* – Toiling into the afternoon, Castico's men free the elephant Himilk from the ice. Another elephant, Gersak, is barely visible inside the ice. *Night* – Castico summons two more bolts of lightning. Three sentries are on the ridge to prevent damage to Himilk or the disturbing of the ritual, while the others sleep at the old smelter.
18th of September	*Day* – The elephant Himilk is still frozen, and Castico's men work to free Gersak. *Night* – Three sentries are on the ridge, while the others sleep at the old smelter.
19th of September	*Day* – Castico's men toil to free Gersak. The elephant Himilk is still frozen near the glacier, but during the late morning Clorilla begins a two-hour-long ritual, at the end of which the animal is revived and stands up. She caresses and soothes the animal, letting it graze for a few hours as she speaks to Mathos. Right before sundown, Clorilla and Mathos lead the animal to the old smelter. *Night* – No sentry is on the ridge, as all are asleep at the old smelter.
20th and 21st of September	*Day* – Castico's men toil to free the elephant Gersak from the ice. *Night* – No sentry is on the ridge, as all are asleep at the old smelter.
22nd of September	*Day* – In the evening, Castico's men free the elephant Gersak from the ice. *Night* - Three sentries are on the ridge, while the others sleep at the old smelter.
23rd of September	*Day* – The elephant Gersak, still frozen, lies on the ground near the ice. Three sentries are stationed on the crest. *Night* – Three sentries are on the ridge, while the others sleep at the old smelter.
24th of September	*Day* – Three sentries are stationed on the crest. The elephant Gersak is still under ice, but in the late morning Clorilla begins a two-hour-long ritual, at the end of which the beast is revived and stands up. She caresses and soothes the animal, letting it graze for a few hours as she speaks to Mathos. Right before sundown, Clorilla and Mathos lead the animal to the old smelter. *Night* – No sentry is on the ridge, as all are asleep at the old smelter.

PROUD CASTICO OF THE BOII

Castico
Value: DV8
1 die: De Bello
2 dice: Ratio, De Corpore, De Societate, Hit Points
3 dice: De Magia, Sensibilitas
Hit Points: 16
Weapons: Gladius (Damage 6), plus a hidden Pugio (Damage 3)
Protections: None

ᛉ *Magic Powers:* Lightning

Castico grew up in Forum Livii, born to a family of local pottery traders, and is a scion of the proud Gallic Boii that lived in the plain of the Padus until almost seven centuries before (see page 162). The Boii helped Hannibal in his journey to Italia, and Vilmetus himself, mythical ancestor of Castico, seems to have moved to meet the Carthaginians beyond the Alps, led them back through, and then allegedly fought multiple times at Hannibal's side, even at the center of the Carthaginian army at the battle of Cannae. To escape Roman persecution after the end of the war, the *familia* of Castico migrated at first on the Danuvium and then to Gallia. It is said that Umbretorix, another of Castico's ancestors who lived a century and a half after Vilmetus, fell with other brave warriors in the battle of Alesia, and his surviving relatives eventually returned to Italia. From these bellicose ancients, Castico inherited an unsatisfied hatred for Rome.

At the same time, Castico's family is also of Etruscan descent, hailing from a village on Mons Bibulum, to the south of Bononia, where lived a Gallo-Etruscan community that the Romans then exterminated in a ferocious war for supremacy after the end of the Second Punic War. From that side of the family, Castico received arcane knowledge: the capacity to summon lightning.

He traveled all over Italia on the trail of Vilmetus and learned of the elephants of Hannibal, whom he then decided to recover. Hanging from his neck on a piece of leather thong, he wears an ancient Carthaginian coin he found in the plains of Cannae during his journey and had pierced for that purpose.

SCENE 9: THE ANCIENT SMELTER

From the path to the Collis Travertisaepe, right before the ridge with the sentries, splits a side path, wide and comfortable, moving beyond a small pass to a separate small valley. There was mined copper since prehistoric times, through digging vertical shafts, then the Empire of Rome resumed extracting activities, with horizontal galleries dug into the side of the mountain. In Roman times, there was also a smelter for metal ore, abandoned along with the mines when the vein was exhausted. The building was partially restored by Castico as base of operations for his group.

SMELTER VALLEY

The valley, slightly lower than the glacier plateau and better exposed to the sun, is partially covered in grass and bushes, some with their leaves missing, eaten by the elephants.

There, in the partially collapsed building, Castico, Clorilla, Mathos, and their crew have taken residence, one watching at the entrance at night while the others sleep, scattered about the rooms, after clearing them and patching the roof with branches and drapes. A hall with a large hearth is used as a kitchen and is where the fire is lit, for heat and cooking. During the day, one can find Clorilla, Mathos, and those workers who are off duty from chiseling ice away, tidying and cooking.

Clorilla and Mathos are in a relationship that they keep secret, fearing that Castico may deem them not serious enough for what he thinks is a key mission for the Celtic cause.

During the night, if any of the freed elephants sleeps on the grass of the plateau, Castico and eight workers sleep at the smelter while three mount watch on the ridge. If no elephant has been freed yet, all eleven workers sleep at the smelter.

At the back of the building, tied to a tree or occasionally left free to graze, is Dherbal, one of the revived elephants. Mathos, during the day, tries to form a bond with him, making him move and experimenting with the commands that he learned when he had to deal with elephants in a market of Numidia. A second one, Mahar, arrives as the 14th of September draws to an end, joined by a third (Himilk) on the 19th, and a fourth (Gersak) on the 24th. On the morning of the 25th, the valley is vacated.

There, too, is a haystack and a honey, although the elephants can feed on their own, too.

If the Custodes break into the valley, the crew defends themselves. The elephants can fight, led by Mathos, but only if untied or cut free, otherwise only defend themselves if attacked.

If the group intervenes during the day, before passing by the plateau where Castico and the others work to free the elephants, and if the sentry has spotted them, then after some time Castico and the rest of the workers intervene.

If half of the workers are killed in combat, the others escape via the main or side road (see *The Other Way Down*, below). Even Clorilla and Mathos try to flee if they see things going against them, jumping on an elephant and spurring it to descend to the plain.

LIVING WAR MACHINES

Elephants of Hannibal
Degree of Danger: 5
Size: 5
Value: DV20
1 die: Damage, De Bello, De Corpore
2 dice: Sensibilitas
3 dice: Hit Points
Hit Points: 45

- *Special Abilities:* Charge, War Training
- *Magic Powers:* Terror (1DV, the victim must be *wounded* by the Elephant)

These are authentic war elephants, trapped under the ice after a grueling march throughout the mountains. Revived after seven centuries, their brusquely-awakened bodies are gaunt and wiry, their skin darker than usual, and in some locations even torn and partially eaten. These animals have quite the ghastly air to them, and a deep, somber stare. Still relatively weak, they are sharper and more sensitive than before, and their appearance is capable of instilling true terror in anybody they fight against.

If an elephant is sent against the Custodes without Mathos riding it, the character can try to calm it (before drawing weapons) with a **De Natura** roll (DT 15, a separate roll per animal). Should the elephant be soothed and not spurred by Mathos, the **De Natura** roll is rolled against DT 12.

THE QUASI DRUID

Clorilla
Value: DV6
1 die: De Bello
2 dice: De Corpore, Hit Points, Ratio
3 dice: De Magia, De Societate, Sensibilitas
Hit Points: 12
Weapons: Hidden Pugio (Damage 3)
Protections: None

- *Magic Powers:* Regeneration (1DV)

Daughter of farmers from the Appenninus between Aemilia and Etruria and raised in the mountain groves, Clorilla has always loved animals. She has ancient knowledge of Celtic rituals, among them *Awaken from Slumber*, which lasts for two hours, in honor of the god Sucellus, whose mace both kills and resuscitates. Clorilla knows that with this ritual she can revive a dead animal, provided its body was not damaged or corrupted, although it does not work on human beings or fantastical creatures with a soul.

With another half-hour-long ritual, Clorilla can heal animals and human beings (2DV).

THE ENTRANCE TO THE MINES

In the wall of the small valley towards the mountain peak open two entrances dug into the rock, tunnels to a Roman mine that connect to one another but a few feet in. Completely dark, they split into a few collapsed tunnels shortly after and lead nowhere.

Inside the furthest from the entrance, live a dozen or so adult bats and a few juveniles that, if disturbed, attack the Custodes, but after the first tempus flee outside, scattering into the sky.

Higher up in the mountains are three vertical shafts to the same ore vein, by now full of detritus, the entrances of the previous prehistoric mines. However, there, too, is nothing of interest.

THE PUNIC ON THE ALPS

Mathos
Value: DV8
1 die: De Societate, Ratio
2 dice: De Natura (Beast Lore), De Corpore, Hit Points, Sensibilitas
3 dice: De Bello,
Hit Points: 16
Weapons: Gladius (Damage 6)
Protections: None

Mathos was born in a village of inner Numidia, frequently wracked by anti-Roman rebellions. Because he took part in one of them, Mathos was arrested and brought to Rome in chains. After years as a slave, he was sold to a gladiator trainer and eventually earned back his freedom in the arena and is, now trading wine between Aemilia and Rome. This is how he met Castico, who, listening to Mathos' tales of rebellion and realizing his hatred for the Empire has never truly abated, enlisted the Punic's help for his expedition because one night he told the Celt he had worked at a market for exotic beasts. Mathos, in fact, is the only one in the group other than Clorilla who is able to handle these mighty beasts.

THE OTHER WAY DOWN

On the opposite side of the small valley is another path, one less used, that leads to Italia. If they cannot return on the main road, Clorilla, Mathos, and any other survivors can take this alternative path after an unsuccessful fight with the Custodes.

THE INHABITANTS OF THE CAVES

Bats
Size: 1
Value: DV3
1 die: Damage, De Bello, De Corpore, Hit Points
2 dice: -
3 dice: Sensibilitas
Hit Points: 3

ᛉ *Special Abilities:* Dive, Flight

They are normal bats, just slightly larger than usual.

CONCLUSION

The Custodes' initial goal is to investigate the nature of these unusual bolts of lightning. Once they realize they are not an omen from the heavens, they should realize on their own they are supposed to investigate these happenings where they fall, otherwise fitting omens should put them on the right path.

Then, their next goal is to defeat Castico and his gang.

It is important for the Custodes to not stop at the work camp and realize there is also the base near the abandoned smelter, with the already-awakened elephants.

What to do with the elephants is left to the Custodes. Killing them to stop the threat they pose is already an important victory, but capturing them and turning them in alive to the Cohors Arcana could make for an even more triumphant end.

The entire adventure should be over by the 25th of September, otherwise on the 26th Castico takes his elephants and people to a friendly Gallic tribe and he is never heard from again... until the day, sometime in the future, when a violent rebellion is sparked in those lands, the legionaries sent to quell it speaking of spectral war elephants ridden by Celtic warriors.

THE BLACK WINGS OF VENGEANCE

INTRODUCTION FOR THE PLAYERS

For some time, a mysterious assassin has been reaping victims in wealthy Etruria, killing three members of important families, their throats slit, and the savaged corpses lying in pools of blood. The victims of this mysterious murderer are Avilis Vetni, a young decurion from Clusium, the aging Marce Spurina, former Haruspex Summus of the prestigious LX Haruspices of Tarquinia, who recently retired to private life, and Thepri Clutie, an indolent and extremely wealthy patrician from Arretium, with a weak claim of descendancy from the Julio-Claudian dynasty.

Each case was handled by the town militia at first, but as matters grew complicated, it was taken over by the *Duoviri* of each involved city. Eventually, realizing this matter was more than random looting or political opposition, the onus of the investigation was assigned to the highest public order authority, the Praefectus Urbi of Rome, who immediately sent trusted functionaries to Etruria to look into the matter. Young Tribunus Laticlavius A. Perrio Maso, eager to begin his political career by resolving a famous case, Quaestionarius G. Licinius Columbus, a skilled investigator of the X Cohors Urbana and a veteran of many intricate cases, and Commentariensis D. Ptolomeus Pontius, libertus of the Emperor and secretary of the very Cohors, tasked with handling interrogations, as well as keeping records, were then sent to represent the Cohortes Urbanae in enforcing the law.

A superficial examination suggests that the wounds were inflicted by an enormous bird of prey, with a strong beak and sharp claws, and, as little sense as this theory makes, rumors have already begun circulating. After their earlier investigations, the three functionaries have instead concluded that the victims had their throats slit with a large, curved tool, maybe a hook or an agricultural tool, before their corpses were savaged with a large but not very sharp knife, responsible for the irregular and gaping wounds. The hypothesis of a non-human assassin has been discarded for being both too irrational and a potential cause of unrest.

There are two witnesses, but neither can provide any help. One is now in a catatonic coma, and the other seems to have been driven mad by terror, his hair prematurely white, as he keeps repeating, "*The wings of vengeance are upon us*," over and over again.

It has emerged from the investigations that the victims were descendants of ancient Etruscan families, and used their Etruscan names, instead of their Latin ones, in their everyday lives. In the official census records, the three victims were known as Aulus Vectius, Marcus Spurinna, and Tiberius Claudius. Other than that, they have nothing in common: not age, not personal habits, not even the places of their deaths. None of the victims were robbed or looted.

Presently, the main suspect is one Quintus Fuscus, an ambiguous shepherd from Vulci, seen by some reliable witnesses on numerous occasions meeting with each of the victims in secret, leading to the hypothesis that he was somehow blackmailing them. He was then arrested by Commentariensis Pontius, to whom he could not provide an alibi, either for any of the three murders or for the bloodstained sickle in his hut.

Although the case seemed to be a matter for the Urbaniciani alone, something suggested to Quaestionarius Columbus that this was no "mundade" murder, asking, against the opinion of the ambitious Maso, for the presence of the Cohors Auxiliaria Arcana to conduct parallel investigations. Great prodigies have manifested around the murders, such as sightings of mysterious winged female figures all around the area, as well as numerous snakes appearing in the most unusual places before disappearing without a manifest reason. However, it was the supernatural terror that overwhelmed the witnesses that led the smart functionary to believe the case required greater and different experience than that his group could call upon.

INTRODUCTION FOR THE DEMIURGE

The three victims were mauled by the Etruscan demon **Tuchulcha**, demigod of vengeance and punishment, his horrid appearance boasting an enormous predatory beak, large vulture wings, writhing snakes on his head, and clawed limbs (for his profile, see page 209).

The three victims were part of a vast secret organization, *The Brotherhood of the Twelve Peoples*, a conspiracy to reinstate rule of the Etruscan lucumones, not just over the region, but even Rome herself. The Brotherhood is inspired by the ancient Dodecapolis that united the most powerful cites of the region at the dawn of Etruscan history, and believes in the best of faith that returning Imperial leadership to the lucumones will usher in a new golden age. They also avoid any unnecessary violence, and prefer to reach their goals with persuasion or bribery. The conspiracy has been working for centuries, and the Brotherhood has numerous affiliates in every class, with some of them even gaining great recognition in technology and science, unbeknownst to most, especially in medicine and dentistry, making Etruscan expertise in these disciplines legendary.

This secret organization has counted among its ranks illustrious figures, the most famous of whom was Emperor Claudius, whose passionate studies on the vanished Etruscan civilization had earned him the nickname "the Etruscologist Emperor". His future rise to power after having Caligula murdered was not a fruit of chance, but a successful operation to place upon the most important throne of the world the one member of the dynasty who, until then, had not shown interest in power. The time of recokoning seemed to have finally come, with a brother tightly sitting on the highest seat of power, but the Brotherhood did not act, soon realizing its own limits. The memory of the Etruscan dominion was buried under centuries of Roman pride, making the imposition of the domination of a different ethnic group upon the bellicose Quirites extremely unlikely to not end in bloodshed. Such a goal was meant to be reached only through persuasion, and not even the will of an Emperor could do that.

The Brotherhood, then, is looking for magical means with which to consolidate its position, such as its centuries-long search for the mythical tomb of King Porsenna. According to legend, in addition to the legendary treasure to finance their movements, it is said to contain magical items of untold power, including many books of wisdom such as the original *Libri Sibyllini* and their prophecies on the future of the Empire. Such items could make the Brotherhood unstoppable.

ETRUSCAN TOMBS

The Etruscans believed that the soul, once leaving the body after death, kept living. They set up "dwellings" for the dead, similar to those of the living, fitted with every commodity and luxury of the rank of the deceased. These could be made up of just one underground chamber, or a system of numerous environments connected by long corridors, often expanded by future generations.

These tombs were dug into the ground, and covered by a circular mound above the surface, earning them the nickname of "mound tombs". Usually, an Etruscan tomb has only one access, an uncharacteristically nondescript door that leads to stairs up to 12 feet deep. At the bottom of the stairs begins a corridor, usually oriented eastward, that in simpler tombs ends in one room of squarish shape decorated to look like a real home. The walls depict items of everyday use, often in plaster bas-reliefs, the ceiling painted as if a real roof with wooden beams. Along the walls were furniture and the burial beds for the deceased to rest upon.

In these tombs were always left objects similar to those their occupants used in life, as decorated and precious as their status in life allowed. One, then, can find the Greek pottery the Etruscans loved so much, as well as local products, such as the famous "bucchero", a class of pottery with a shiny black surface. The Etruscans were famous for their jewel-crafting skill, so the most precious objects one could find in their tombs are jewels and weapons with chiseled scabbards decorated with bronze and precious metals.

Because of the mound above, the tombs were not too conspicuous to the outside observer, a measure to grant the dead their rightful rest. Now, however, as the centuries have passed, and more land and dirt have piled around and above the original burials, their doors are hidden and their locations lost.

The wealth hidden in many of these tombs, of course, sparked a mound hunt, leading to the formation of a specialized group of "tomb hunters" (looters), so skilled that they could "read" the rolling of the ground and tell which hills hid a mound. Because it is hard to spot the door, it is not unusual for tomb robbers to dig through rooves, forming tunnels that often cause great damage to decorations and structures.

THE SEARCH FOR THE TOMB OF PORSENNA

Finding the tomb is, however, extremely unlikely, for its exact location is lost, and misinterpreted by a thousand legends, with every city of Etruscan origin claiming this mythical sepulcher is in its territory, and countless are the rumors on its contents. Not even Emperor Claudius, who spent his entire life studying the Etruscan civilization, could ever find it with certainty.

Now, the conspirators have taken a radical approach, opening all the patrician tombs in the area of the Dodecapolis in the hopes of, sooner or later, finding the right one. Such an unorthodox endeavor is aided by an ambiguous character, Quintus Fuscus, who trades in luxury goods of dubious origin: in short, a tomb robber and a fence, who knows the locations of many long-abandoned burials, forgotten even by the descendants of their inhabitants. Fuscus, in return, is free to loot the tombs of their precious contents, especially the beautiful black ceramic vases, now impossible to replicate, turning them into a priceless commodity. The new wealthy elite of the Capital have a great interest in purchasing an original Etruscan vase, and since there is no legal market for them, they are willing to pay exorbitant prices to the black one.

THE WRATH OF CHARUN AND THE VENGEANCE OF TUCHULCHA

This systematic defiling has caused the wrath of the Etruscan god **Charun**, the guardian of the gates of the afterlife and burials (see page 208). The continuous intrusions of Quintus Fuscus have attracted his attention, while the last descendants of the Etruscan people being responsible for them has caused his wrath. Charun, then, has sent dire Tuchulcha to annihilate those who have committed such unholy desecration, starting with those behind them first, and then moving on to the perpetrators. Tuchulcha is now just at the beginning of his bloody work, ending only with the elimination of the twelve lucumones of the Brotherhood, considered by Charun to be the moral culprits of the profanations, and Quintus Fuscus.

These events have had dire repercussions on the magical balance in the region, stirring entities that were thought to have disappeared after the extinction of the Etruscan people. As well as stern Charun and ruthless Tuchulcha, pale Vanth, whose sword cuts the threads of mortal existence, and the winged Lasa, the nymphs of prophecy, have made their return.

THE TWELVE LUCUMONES

These are the leaders of the districts of the Brotherhood, each representing one of the ancient cities of the Dodecapolis. Excluding the three who were killed, they are:

- **Cai Ceicna** (Caius Caecina) of Caere;
- **Numsi Cele** (Numerius Gellius) of Vulci;
- **Petruni Raufe** (Petronius Rufus) of Rusellae;
- **Avilis Trepi** (Aulus Trebonius) of Vetulonia;
- **Tite Plauti** (Titus Plautus) of Veii;
- **Cuinte Tutna** (Quintus Tutilius) of Volsinii;
- **Pupli Herme** (Publius Firmus) of Perusia;
- **Cnevi Palpe** (Gnaeus Balbus) of Cortona;
- **Salie Clauce** (Salvus Glaucus) of Volaterrae.

The survivors have realized that their three companions were killed by a demon of the Underworld, knowing the ancient religion and being aware of the tomb robbing. Each, then, greatly fears being the next victim, but none intends to help the investigations because it would lead to the exposing of the conspiracy. Rather, they are willing to let Tuchulcha kill them.

However, they still chose to halt the tomb robbing while they wait to meet, as they do yearly, on the occasion of the upcoming celebrations of Voltumna, the Etruscan god of nature and harvest (see page 129), in his shrine outside Volsinii.

Note. *This adventure is set in Italia, in Regio VII (Etruria), so the Demiurge should be familiar with the dedicated section in Part I. Because the narrative of this adventure is a mystery concerning the supernatural and magical traits of the old Etruscans, the Demiurge should also be familiar with their magic in Part II,* The Brotherhood of the Twelve Peoples *in Part III, and the* Etruscan Artifacts *in Part IV.*

Adventure Average Value: 10 EP

SYNOPSIS

This adventure is made up of three parts:

PART 1: THE CUSTODES INVESTIGATE

This first part has a strong investigative component, as the Custodes gather useful clues to shed light on previous events.

PART 2: THE TOMB OF PORSENNA

The second part is closer to a classic adventure, a journey through wild and unknown environs, encounters with supernatural creatures, a subterranean section, a labyrinth, and a treasure to find.

PART 3: THE SHRINE OF VOLTUMNA

The third part sees the unraveling of the plot and the final fight with a powerful supernatural entity.

Throughout the adventure, the Custodes have the chance to meet a variety of NPCs. Usually, for the sake of the plot, only brief descriptions are necessary when an NPC is mentioned for the first time. For more important NPCs, however, their profiles and characteristics are provided in dedicated sidebars.

PART 1: THE CUSTODES INVESTIGATE

SCENE 1: MANY NEWS, LITTLE SUBSTANCE

Nine days before Ides of August, on the 6th, the characters, on swift horses, reach Clusium, elected the headquarters of the investigation and the functionaries sent by Rome, as the first corpse was found there. The Custodes are to act undercover, posing as other agents of the Prefectus Urbi.

Perrio Maso does not welcome the Custodes with enthusiasm, afraid their presence may diminish his glory in resolving this investigation, which he believes is already over. Quintus Fuscus is the ideal culprit, and that is enough for him to consider the matter settled. In addition to being obligated to provide the information in the *Introduction for the Players* section, the Demiurge can reveal through Maso the following about the victims:

- **Aulus Vectius** was killed twelve days before, early in the morning, right outside the walls of Clusium, on the road to the surrounding countryside. That road passes by a field, where its owner was working and witnessed the murder. However, he could not say anything, as some terrible event overwhelmed his mind, reducing him to a vegetative cripple. Aulus Vectius leaves a young widow, Portia, far removed cousin of the Emperor, and does not have any other close relatives.
- **Marcus Spurinna** was found dead four days later, in Tarquinia. His mangled corpse was face-first inside the sacred fence, near the altar, upon which he had just sacrificed a sheep to read its entrails. He died at sundown, so Spurinna likely intended to observe the stars after the sacrifice. Licinius, a young boy from a powerful family that often served as *camillus* (an assistant of sorts) for Spurinna in performing the sacrifices, was also present. Young Licinius, however, is wracked with terror, his hair turning prematurely white and his memory blank. To the questions of the investigators, he only answers, *"The wings... The wings of vengeance... they are upon us."* Spurinna leaves an aging wife and two sons.
- **Tiberius Claudius** was killed a week later in his *figlina*, a pottery workshop in Arretium, found dead by the workers in the morning, near one of the clay cleansing vats. There were no witnesses. Claudius was not married, and lived with his sister Claudilla (see page 247).

Commentariensis **Ptolomeus Pontius** informs the characters that one of the slaves of Tiberius Claudius confusedly mentioned a secret organization of sorts, which he called "the Brotherhood". However, they could not grasp anything about this group because the interrogator, a local, not as skilled as the ones Pontius works with in Rome, accidentally killed the prisoner. If the characters ask Pontius what he knows about Quintus Fuscus, the commentariensis says his men found a bloodstained sickle in his hut that may have been the murder weapon.

If the Custodes ask to see the sickle, Pontius easily shows them, a typical farmer's implement. A Retrocognition ritual performed on the sickle allows piecing together that Quintus used it to defend himself against a bear in a grove.

Now the Custodes can interrogate Quintus Fuscus, held in Clusium, or investigate any of the victims.

The journey from Clusium to Tarquinia is a day long, because the two cities are not directly connected by important roads, forcing travelers to take local paths. During the journey, the Custodes may have unpleasant encounters (roll twice on the Encounters Table for Etruria, on page 249). The safer, but longer, option is taking the Via Cassia (roll only once on the Encounters Table, but the journey takes two days).

SCENE 2: THE SUSPECT

If the Custodes interrogate Quintus Fuscus, he claims to know nothing of the murders. If asked about his relationship with any of the victims, he says they asked him about the surroundings of their city to know if there were any ruins or other ancient vestiges. Quintus is a shepherd, afterall, and knows the countryside well. However, he does not know if they were looking for anything in particular, nor whether they were in contact with each other. If asked about the Brotherhood or the other lucumones, he says he does not know anything. If interrogated about the sickle, he vigorously claims to have used it to defend himself against a bear. If the Custodes decide to search his hut, they must head to Vulci. Its furniture and items are miserly, but the group finds numerous digging implements. There are also some clothes, including, piled in a corner, a dusty grape-colored cap. It is the *Tùtulus of Turms* (an Etruscan magical artifact from Part IV), found by Fuscus in a tomb and never identified. A freshly tilled small field is waiting for new seeds; if the group digs, they find a crate with five precious bucchero vases in perfect condition. If they look around, the characters do not find any animal pens, as the so-called shepherd has no sheep. In a clearing outside Vulci, the Custodes see five young lads playing *quadrìolus*, a typical game of Etruscan origin (see sidebar on page 245). If the Custodes do not play the game with them before asking questions, they are met with a wall of diffidence and silence. However, they have much better chances if they spend some time watching, or even challenge the players to a game. If they do, and then ask about Quintus Fuscus, the players say they know him. They say he is a shepherd, calling him “with neither sheep nor coin”, as he has never been seen with a herd. One of them claims he has a field or orchard, but does not know where, as he has often seen him wandering with digging implements, but never digging or carrying vegetables. The others, anyway, do not believe in the slightest that Quintus Fuscus is a farmer. In short, this ambiguous character does not seem to have an income, and yet money does not seem to be an issue for him; the few times he is in Vulci, he often spends generously at the local tavern. He does not seem to have either particularly strong friendships or love interests in Vulci.

THE SUSPECT

Quintus Fuscus
Value: DV6
1 die: De Bello, De Magia (Superstitions), De Societate, Ratio
2 dice: De Corpore, De Societate (Deceit), Hit Points, Sensibilitas
3 dice: De Natura
Hit Points: 12
Weapons: Pugio (Damage 3)
Protections: None

Born in Taberna Frigida, a station along the Via Aurelia, six miles south of Luna, Quintus Fuscus has traveled much in his life, starting as a shepherd, but soon taking more profitable jobs. Now, he fences stolen wares, and recently specialized in the clandestine trade of black pottery from ancient Etruscan tombs.

SCENE 3: THE HOUSE OF AULUS VECTIUS

The Custodes may want to interrogate the widow of Aulus Vectius, Portia.

If they visit his elegant home, a typical noble domus urbana in the center of Clusium, they are welcomed by the door slave into the wide atrium. Its gracious walls are decorated with fashionable paintings that imitate unusual architectures where are set mythological scenes. On the floor at the center of the atrium, the roof opens into the impluvium, an elegant marble pool for gathering rainwater, decorated with delicate bas-reliefs and colorful marble inlays. As they wait to be received by the mistress of the house, they have the chance to observe the altar to the Lares and the Poenati, bereft of offerings, and the family safe, open and empty. An old lady leads the group into a beautiful inner garden.

On a rosewood bench sits a girl not older than eighteen, dressed in mourning, with her hair loose and not wearing jewelry, as tradition demands. However, though dressed like one, she does not look like a particularly sorrowful widow, surrounded by her personal maidens, to whom she gives numerous orders as they buzz around the house like a small hive of bees. As she had no interest in the investigations of the Urbaniciani, the Custodes are equally of little consequence to her. Her wedding was arranged by the two families to strengthen their political alliance, and now she cannot believe her luck. As a childless widow at such an early age, she can have back her dowry and inherit part of the possessions of her late husband, as well as move to the Urbs to enjoy her youth, instead of rotting in the contryside among funerary urns. In fact, she is almost ready to leave.

PLAYING QUADRÌOLUS

Quadrìolus is played by at least two players, each with a coin. First, trace on the ground a five foot square, split into four smaller squares, and then trace a line in front of it.

Each player stands behind the line at a distance proportionate to their skill, usually between nine and twelve feet for the average player. At the beginning of the game, each player flicks their coin at the line, and whoever got closer to it makes the first play, the others following in order of distance. To correctly flick a coin, the player must curve their index finger in a trigger motion and place the thumb on it, then place the coin on the thumbnail and spring it, so that the coin falls flat and does not roll away.

The first player then gathers all the coins and flicks them, one at a time, to land them inside one of the four smaller squares. Each time they do, that coin is theirs to keep. If a coin, instead, falls out of the smaller squares or on one of the separating lines, it remains where it is.

Once all the coins are flicked, the player begins “adjusting” them, hooking the nail of the index finger onto the pad of the thumb and letting it spring forward to propel one of the coins on the ground. The goal is to send the coin into one of the four smaller squares to win it and move on to the following coin. In the case of failure, it is the turn of the following player to “adjust” that same coin, or another, until all the coins have been won by someone.

In mechanical game terms, a game of quadrìolus is simulated by rolling opposed **Coordinatio** or **De Corpore** checks to determine the distance from the line and the order of play. Then, the player whose coin landed closest rolls **Coordinatio** or **De Corpore** (DT 6) as many times as there are coins in play, winning one on every success. As soon as one player fails a roll, it is the turn of the following player, until they either fail or all the coins have been won.

If the Custodes somehow manage to inspect the precious contents of the family safe, moved to a reinforced box in Portia’s baggage, they notice an ancient ring carved with an Etruscan letter. It does not seem to be of any value, and Portia simply says her husband “found it somewhere”, and can be convinced to leave it to the Custodes on a successful **De Societate** or **Auctoritas** roll (whether the character asks with respectful or threatening tones, the DT is 6 or more, depending on how convincing the Demiurge thinks the reasons of the players are). The ring is in an amulet found by Aulus Vectius during his rounds with Quintus Fuscus, reducing the damage suffered by its bearer by 1d3, after rolling any required Protection. When it has prevented a total of 10 points of damage, the ring splits in twain and loses all its powers.

The Custodes can inspect the chambers of the husband, accompanied by the old woman they saw earlier, late Vectius’ nurse, who seems to be rather affected by his death. If the Custodes interrogate her, she says, distraught, *“I told him not to waste time with that good-for-nothing Fuscus, though he wasn’t the one who killed him. Didn’t have the guts.”*

Among the many wax tablets on the desk of Aulus Vectius, there are letters he was about to send to various people. One of them is addressed to Tiberius Claudius:

“...I am almost certain I am on the right path. The tomb is here in Klevsin, with all the treasure we have looked for all these years, so you can stop searching. I am sure I will have a great discovery to announce at our next gathering in Fanum Voltumnae, and that the last day of festivity will also be the first of a New Era...”

Vectius, obviously, is referencing the tomb of Porsenna. Klevsin is the Etruscan name of Clusium, as any character who passes a **De Magia** roll (DT 12) knows, although it can be learned simply by asking any somewhat-schooled local. The Fanum Voltumnae is an ancient shrine around Volsinii, identified on a successful **De Magia** or **De Scientia** roll (DT 9), or by asking anyone in Etruria. In that way, the group also learns that the festival of Voltumna spans three days, the Ides of August and the two days after, consisting of celebrations, competitions, dances, mimicry, and religious rituals, culminating in a solemn procession and the sacrifice of a bull.

Unfortunately for the Custodes, they are not alone in noticing the letter; Lucilla, personal handmaiden of Portia, has read it, too. She does not know that the treasure mentioned by Aulus Vectius is the magical lore of the Etruscan people, so she mentioned it to her lover, Turpilius Albinus, who owns a tavern in town. If Lucilla notices the Custodes taking interest in the letter and the tomb, Albinus sets some of his people (equal in number to the characters; use the Criminals profile from the Core Rulebook) to shadow the Custodes during their stay in Clusium, wait for them to locate the tomb, and then loot the treasure from their cold hands.

The Custodes can also visit the location of the murder, the road that from the town walls descends from the tuff rock and passes by a small grove to the right, obstructing vision, and fields to the left. If the Custodes spend more than a few minutes in the same place, they hear from the treeline a strident voice calling, *"Mercy! Mercy!"* If the group rushes in, they can barely make out the shape of a talking bird on a branch. It is a Pica (see page 198) and, although its vocabulary is limited and instead of answering it often simply repeats what it hears, it is possible to speak with it. However, it witnessed the murder: *"Big bird killed big man,"* it says. If asked about the last words of Aulus Vectius, it says, *"Mercy, great domain."* It does not know the word "demon", so it uses the closest approximation in its vocabulary.

THE INNKEEPER OF CLUSIUM

Turpilius Albinus

Value: DV6

1 die: De Bello, Sensibilitas

2 dice: De Corpore, Ratio

3 dice: De Societate (Negotiation), Hit Points

Hit Points: 18

Weapons: Pugio (Damage 3), usually hidden under his sheepskin waistcoat

Protections: None

Born in Clusium, he inherited from his parents a successful tavern and inn. Albinus is tall and muscular, with black hair, his thick eyebrows joined together, and a wide mouth. A man of strong appetites, he is the lover of beautiful Lucilla, handmaiden of Portia, the widow of Aulus Vectius. Among his clients are many characters of questionable reputation.

SCENE 4: THE HOUSE OF MARCUS SPURINNA

In Tarquinia, the Custodes can head immediately to the mansion of the gens Spurinna, so well known in town that anyone can point it out to the group. Gens Spurinna is of conservative traditions, so under the same roof lived the pater familias Marcus with his consort Fannia, their two sons Lucius and Caius, and their respective wives and children. As Marcus has died, the new pater familias is now his firstborn, Lucius Spurinna, duovir of Tarquinia for the current year.

The Custodes are lead through a stern atrium, decorated with frescoes in the ancient style, where is the family altar, covered in fresh offerings, right beside the case containing the wax masks of the illustrious ancestors of the family.

A servant leads the group into the presence of the widow, Fannia, an old woman with a noble bearing, but visibly put to great test by grief. To the questions of the Custodes, she can only say that her husband had no enemies and enjoyed great respect in Tarquinia. He lived there, having been for many long years the Haruspex Summus of the LX Haruspices, who have here their official seat (the acting High Haruspex, Domitia Claudilla, is presently in Rome, rumors say summoned by none other than the wife of the Emperor).

However, at some point, as if speaking to herself, Fannia says, *"He was so stubborn... At his age, he could have let it go... I begged him to tell the others to find someone else... But he could not! For him it was a mission, and he felt responsible..."*

Her words are cut short by the sudden entrace of her son Lucius, greatly irritated by the Custodes' speaking to his mother, and hastily attempting to make them leave the house. He denies there is anything important in his father's office and claims to have shown everything to the investigators anyway. If the Custodes then ask his aging mother for clarifications on her previous words, he insists they must go, and Fannia says it was nothing important.

As they leave, however, the Custodes stumble into the secretary of the deceased, who asks them if they have need of him to open the private safe of the Haruspex. He could not show it to the other investigators when they came the week before because he was in Volsinii to arrange for the journey of his master to the Shrine of Voltumna. If the Custodes inquire on the matter, he says that every year the entire family gathers in Volsinii to celebrate the god Voltumna. It is a typically Etruscan tradition, tied to the ancient Federation of the twelve major cities of Etruria. Even if the Federation fell to Roman conquest, it is still celebrated all over Etruria every year with great solemnity.

In the safe, the characters find numerous documents about the late Haruspex's public office, as well as list of twelve names. Obviously, they are those of the other lucumones:

Twelve Lacumones	
Marce Spurina	Tarquinia
Cai Ceicna	Caere
Numsi Cele	Vulci
Petruni Raufe	Rusellae
Avilus Vetni	Clusium
Avilus Trepi	Vetulonia
Tite Plauti	Veii
Cuinte Tutna	Volsinii
Pupli Herme	Perusia
Thepri Clutie	Arretium
Cnevi Palpe	Cortona
Salie Clauce	Volaterrae

The Custodes can also investigate the place where the murder happened, in the sacred fence. It is a slightly elevated platform, on the highest point of the Acropolis and oriented in accordance with the templum (see page 132), the altar at its center looking southward. The left part, to the east, is called *pars familiaris* and is the one in which good omens are read, while the one to the right, to the west, is called *pars hostilis*, is for the negative ones. Looking carefully, some distance away from the fence, the Custodes find a frayed leather cord, to which is tied a small case of the same material containing a papyrus scroll written with an Etruscan formula and a Latin insertion:

Thapicum thapintas (insert the name of the demon)
aprensais thapintais Thapicun Iluun Charun
thezin cien vel aruncha eichnas atelque mei

If the Custodes can translate it, it reads:

"Great demon of the Underworld (insert the name of the *demon),*
go back to Charun, lord of demons,
who seven times commands you and placates
your wrath and hunger."

It is a formula to banish demons that must be recited in Etruscan, adding the appropriate name of the target entity. Marcus Spurinna pieced it together, guessing the nature of the murders, and was about to share it with the other lucumones at the meeting in Volsinii. When the demon jumped on him, he was dead long before he could realize the danger he was in.

SCENE 5: AT THE *FIGLINA* OF TIBERIUS CLAUDIUS

If the Custodes choose to investigate the place where Tiberius Claudius was killed, they must make their way to Arretium. Around the city, the countryside seems deserted, and they immediately notice that all the local farmhouses seem fitted with rudimentary fortifications, as the surroundings are harrowed by a terrible **Chimera of Arretium** (see page 201). The Custodes must be very careful (when they arrive in or leave the town, they must roll **Sensibilitas** against DT 6, or DT 9 at sundown or during the night, to avoid being ambushed by the Chimera, which pounces out of a nearby grove).

Once at Claudius' workshop, the Custodes are led to the principal's office, through a wide-open space with numerous vats for working clay. On the opposite side of the opening are a few orderly stacks of freshly-shaped bricks, still to be hardened, which a young apprentice marks with the date and the name of the owner of the workshop. Nearby are more piles of freshly hardened-bricks, ready for aging.

In a separate section are the ready bricks, divided according to their size. In an open shed are numerous workers operating lathes and shaping vessels. A strong smell of smoke draws attention onto another shed, from which rise thick pillars of black smoke; they are the ovens to harden both bricks and beautifully decorated pottery.

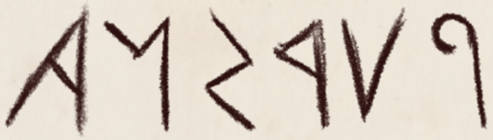
The group is then led to the office. A tall and matronly woman in her forties is discussing with a craftsman which kind of decoration is the most requested at the moment in the field of architectural terracotta. It is Claudilla, Tiberius Claudius' sister, a practical and down-to-earth woman. She explains that it is she who actually manages the workshop, her late brother never proving interested in business. On the one hand, being a woman, she was not taken seriously when she attempted to openly manage the workshop on her own, so the two agreed on having Tiberius as the owner but her making the decisions. On the other hand, he spent all day wandering around the countryside with a weird guy, some Quintus Fuscus, digging, he said, to find a particular clay vein with exceptional properties. Claudilla did not believe much in that, but it seemed a harmless quirk, so she paid it no mind.

She shows the Custodes the desk of her brother, with a draft of a letter for Aulus Vectius:

"...According to what I found in the family archive, it seems my illustrious ancestor, Emperor Claudius the Etruscologist, authored an Etruscan grammar. All traces of it were lost, but I was able to

piece together the original writing of the name of King Porsenna, as it appears on his tomb..."

Below, is the following writing:



(For the Etruscan alphabet, see the sidebar on page 188.)

The letter continues:

"A dark inscription about the tomb, found on an ancient tablet, says that to find it one must 'follow now the sword, now the shield, now the sword, and now the shield'. I cannot make sense of it yet."

What Claudius did not know is that it is the way to navigate the labyrinth inside the tomb. At every crossing, one must alternatively turn right and then left, as "sword" and "shield" are code for the hand bearing them, right and left specifically. Nearby is a crate full of maps, closed with a lock that does not seem to match any key. It must be opened either without Claudilla knowing (**De Corpore**, DT 9) or with her permission (**De Societate** or **Auctoritas**, DT 6, which may increase if the group antagonizes her with their authority). Among maps of the whole of Etruria and fragmentary notes of all kinds, difficult to make any sense of, is a partial copy of the draft of the Etruscan grammar by Emperor Claudius. It enables translating from Etruscan into Latin, if successful in a prolonged **De Scientia** action (DT 9, requiring at least 3 successes).

Among the maps, there is one of each of the twelve cities of the Brotherhood, represented schematically, and with much greater focus on its surroundings. Noted on each map are the known or presumed sites of the ancient Etruscan necropolises. If the Custodes look at Clusium's and have already been where Aulus Vectius was killed, they realize he was likely murdered as he was making his way to the ancient necropolis.

The Custodes can then investigate the location where Tiberius Claudius was killed, near one of the clay vats, but find nothing interesting. If, however, they interrogate the workers about anything out of the ordinary, they learn from one Porphirius (a strong man with a simple air to him) that in one of the nearby vats were found two large eagle footprints, roughly a foot and a half long. He erased them when he had to use the clay to make bricks, and thought they were not that important.

PART 2: THE TOMB OF PORSENNA

SCENE 6: THE FOURTH MURDER

Two days after the beginning of the investigation, the Custodes are given disconcerting news: the night before, a fourth murder was committed, its victim the trader from Cortona, Gnaeus Balbus. A quick check identifies his name on the list found at the home of Marcus Spurinna. Now, Perrio Maso is, much to his chagrin, forced to set Quintus Fuscus free.

Gnaeus Balbus was killed in his house, as he was walking along the ornamental pool of the atrium, with neither witnesses nor clues. Any investigation of his house is fruitless.

At this point, the Custodes may choose to question Quintus Fuscus, whether they already have or not. The so-called shepherd is terrified; he learned of the last murder and believes he will be the next victim, confessing to the Custodes that he worked with the victims. For Gnaeus Balbus, he used to do jobs of the untoward variety, telling the group of the tomb desecrations. He also adds that he felt like something horrible was bound to happen, as every time he made his way through a tomb he felt he was being followed by a malign entity. If the Custodes show him the list of the twelve names, Fuscus says he has worked for all of them.

He also says that before the killing began, he told Marcus Spurinna he had found a new, promising place, but did not yet have the time to explore it. Spurinna wanted to see the new tomb before heading to Volsinii and the celebration of Voltumna, as he did yearly, like the other eleven on the list. Quintus Fuscus is willing to accompany the Custodes to the newfound tomb, if they guarantee him immunity for having desecrated the others and, after the matter has been settled, let him go free.

If the group agrees, they must convince the authorities to set Quintus Fuscus free. Quaestionarius Columbus is relatively easy to persuade (**Auctoritas** or **De Societate**, DT 6), while slightly harder is Perrio Maso (DT 9), who after the fourth murder has no idea what to do. If successful, the group and Quintus Fuscus leave the following morning, headed to the secret location of the tomb, near Clusium.

If the Custodes have performed their investigation well, they should be able to spot the tomb of Porsenna on their own. From the letter on the desk of Aulus Vectius, the group learned it must be near Clusium, and the map pointing out the specific location of the ancient necropolis was in the crate under the bed of Tiberius Claudius, on whose desk was also the inscription.

SCENE 7: NEAR CLUSIUM

The countryside around Clusium is bucolic and pleasant, with well-kept fields and small rustic cottages. Even the road is wide and comfortable, though not paved. If Fuscus leads the Custodes, at some point he leaves the main road, turning right and taking a barely-visible path as he moves with confidence around the progressively more deserted land, eventually reaching something resembling an abandoned quarry. Fuscus explains that there are many around Clusium, because once it was an important center for the production of stone funeral urns. Unfortunately, now alabaster urns from Volaterrae seems to be more fashionable, although the taste of high society has shifted towards sarcophagi from Attica, in white marble and decorated with beautiful reliefs. Therefore, there are a great many abandoned stone quarries these days.

They take progressively narrowing tunnels that eventually force the group to move in single file, torches lit, much to their surprise ending up in a wide, open-sky clearing, beyond which the group can see a thick grove. Quintus Fuscus says that among the trees is a large dirt mound that he believes to be covering a subterranean cave of great size that he did not enter, as the ominous echoes and other, clattering noises he could hear from that cavern scared him.

If Fuscus does not accompany the Custodes, they must complete an Exploration (DT 9, 6 successes required) to arrive at that point. For every exploration roll they make, the Demiurge rolls on the Encounters Table for Etruria.

SCENE 8: ENTERING THE TOMB

Once through the grove, they reach what looks like the entrance of the mound, a large stone slab on which is carved a bolt of lightning and an Etruscan word. If the Custodes searched the office of Tiberius Claudius, they are able to recognize it as the Etruscan writing of the name Porsenna.

The door is sealed, but a **Vigor** roll (DT 18) can move it. Up to three characters can attempt the endeavor, adding the results of their rolls together.

The group enters a small vestibule, not wider than three feet, from which descends a steep staircase, of which the characters cannot see the bottom. As they descend, their torches illuminate numerous wall paintings, one of which is particularly ominous. It is a grotesque male figure, with great vulture wings, a curved beak, and snakes among its hair, that seems to burst from the

ETRURIA – ENCOUNTERS TABLE

Roll 1d10 every day spent traveling along secondary roads or country paths.

D10 Roll	Event
1-2	**No encounter.** Roads and paths seem peaceful.
3	**Brigands.** The Custodes are ambushed by (1:1) Brigands.
4	**Viper.** A Custos is attacked by a viper. (Use the profile of a Venomous Snake. The viper automatically catches its target by surprise.)
5	**Boars.** The group must face (1:2) ferocious Boars.
6	**Dipsas.** The Custodes are attacked by a group (1:2) of Dipsas (see page 198).
7	**Amphisbaena.** The characters find an Amphisbaena (see page 198).
8	**Salamander.** The characters find a Salamander (see page 207).
9	**Wolves.** The characters are surrounded by a pack (1:1) of Wolves.
10	**Bear.** A large and hungry Bear blocks the road.

walls to confront any visitor. He is Tuchulcha, warning intruders to let the dead rest, his sight so terrible the Custodes must roll **Ratio** (DT 6). Whoever fails loses 1d6 Pietats and runs back screaming, gripped by terror and requiring many minutes and the reassurance of their companions to be convinced to keep going.

After a lengthy descent, the group finds a wooden door that opens without issue. The group then enters a wide room covered in beautiful paintings of a man portrayed as both a warrior and a priest, clothed in the archaic Etruscan style. In the middle of the room, on a raised pillar, is a great terracotta sarcophagus, decorated with a cover shaped like a funerary bed bearing the same male figure portrayed in rich finery on the walls. The group is in the presence of King Porsenna.

The room has many ancient vases, both Etruscan and Greek. Fuscus, speechless, declares they are worth a fortune; he has never seen so many, so beautiful, and in such a good state. Alongside the pottery are a great many splendid ceremonial weapons and armor in silver-chiseled bronze, as priceless as the rest.

The sarcophagus is sealed, but it can be opened without too much effort. Inside, it is empty: no bones, no clothing, no nothing.

Passing an **Ingenium** roll (DT 6) allows guessing that the room is too small to make the booming echoes the group heard during their exploration. On a following **De Scientia** roll (DT 9; DT 6 if the character has realized there must be a larger space behind the echo), on the wall at the back of the room they find a secret door leading to staircase heading up, steeper and narrower than the other.

SCENE 9: IN THE SEPULCHER OF THE KING

A short, ascending ramp leads to another perfectly smooth slate of stone bearing the lightning bolt and the Etruscan word. To move it, the cramped space requires a **Vigor** roll (DT 12; only two Custodes can attempt to lift it). Beyond, the group enters an immense cavern, more than 90 feet tall, with an exceptional construction at its center.

It is of square shape and is made of enormous stone blocks, each side 300 feet wide and 50 feet tall. On this square base, are five tall and thin pyramids, four on the corners and one at the center, each bearing a large bronze globe. On these globes rests an immense dome, its edges laden with chimes hanging from small chains and ringing mysteriously at every breath of air. Above the dome are four spires, each bearing five smaller ones.

At the center of the side facing the Custodes is a small, open door, leading to a labyrinth that covers the entirety of the base of the building.

The spots marked with X on the map on the opposite page are traps. The first character who passes by each of them must roll **Coordinatio** (DT 6) to avoid falling into the spiked pit that suddenly opens beneath them and suffering 3d6 points of damage.

Eventually, at the exit of the labyrinth, the Custodes enter a wide funerary chamber, in which towers a golden chariot pulled by twelve golden horses. On it is a sarcophagus identical to the terracotta one in the lower chamber, though golden and accented with enamel decorations. This sarcophagus contains the remains of King Porsenna.

The room is also scattered with all manner of riches:

- A statue of a hen and 5000 chicks, life-size and in solid gold;
- A round bronze container, similar to those used in libraries for the volumina, with the nine original scrolls of the *Libri Sibyllini* containing the prophecies on the future of Rome and Italia (see the chapter on Etruscan Artifacts in Part III of this volume), written in Etruscan;
- A rectangular bronze box decorated with a chiseled silver bolt of lightning, containing the Tablet of Pursna, the most important and powerful Etruscan artifact, with the secrets of summoning lightning bolts (see Part V of this volume).

SCENE 10: A WARNING FROM THE HEAVENS

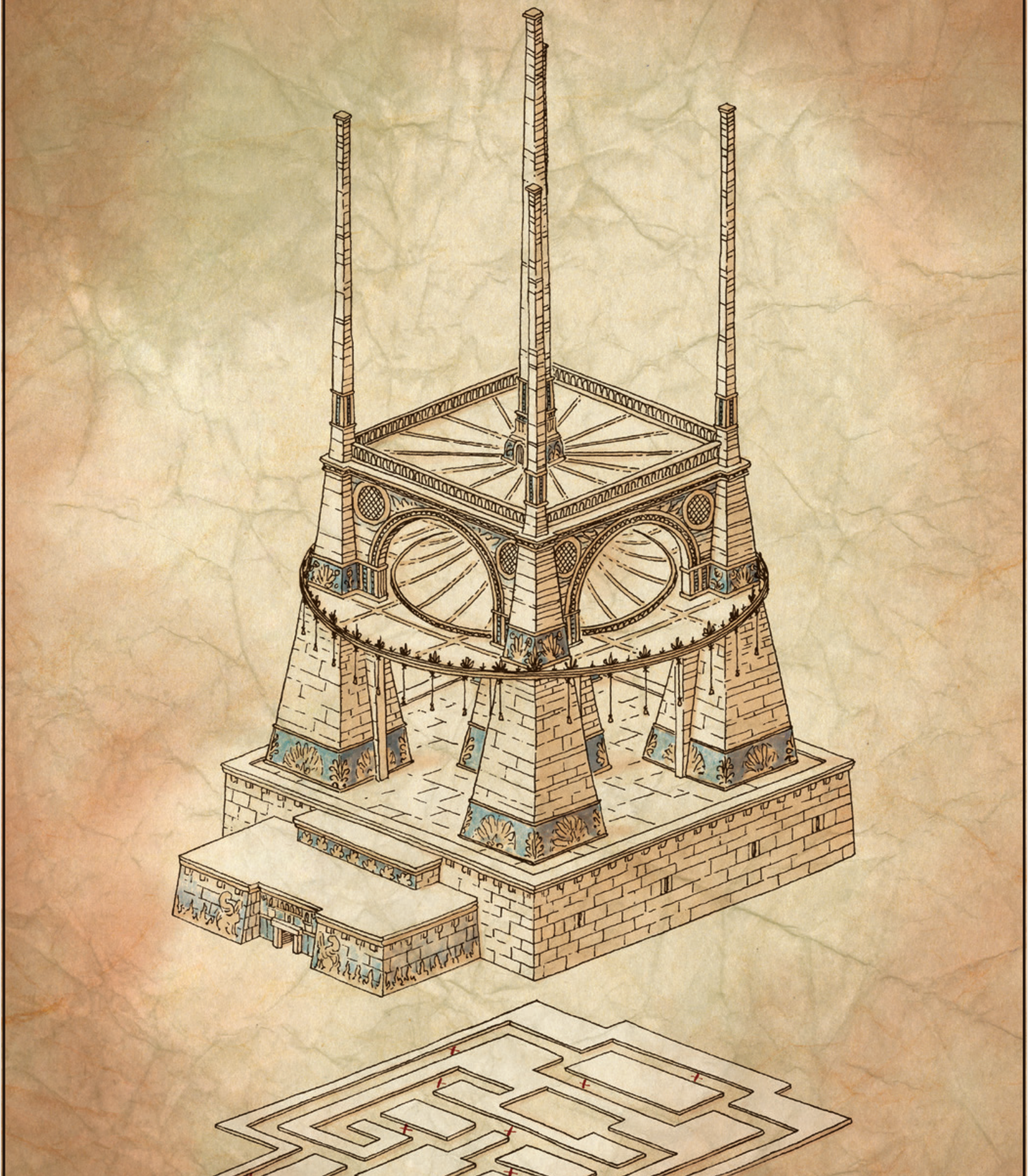
When the Custodes are on their way out of the outer door of the tomb, they see a winged maiden of unnatural beauty, completely naked but for a crown of oaken leaves, descending from the sky towards them. She is **Achununa**, the Lasa who protects heroes and the pure of heart. If attacked, she vanishes into the sky, never to return, and the Custodes, a few days later, are attacked by **Tuchulcha** (see his profile on page 209) to avenge the defiling of the tomb of Porsenna.

If the Custodes let Achununa speak, she warns them. As good as their intentions are, they have defiled the tomb of one of the most valorous Etruscan kings, and divine Charun will soon come for their souls, sending demonic Tuchulcha against them. The only way to save themselves is to find the other defilers, as many as the hills of Rome, and convince them to return what they took from the dead in a cleansing and restitution ritual. With that said, the Lasa disappears.

She refers to the surviving lucumones, whom the characters can identify with a successful Divination ritual, as long as they know of their existence.

Note. *To fulfill the task of the Lasa, the Custodes must gather the lucumones in prayer, ask for Charun's forgiveness, and sacrifice to him any Etruscan black vases or any other Etruscan ancient objects in their possession.*

TOMB OF PORSENNA



If the Custodes are accompanied by Fuscus, as they leave the cave, he leaves them as per their agreement, only to be found dead after three days around Rusellae, mangled by the claws of Tuchulcha.

Back in Clusium, the Custodes learn that a fifth murder has happened, Quintus Tutilius, a land owner from Volsinii, killed the night before in the same violent way.

PART 3: THE SHRINE OF VOLTUMNA

SCENE 11: VOLSINII

The letter on Aulus Vectius' desk and the words of Marcus Spurinna's secretary seem to point to the shrine of Voltumna as the place where all the lucumones will gather. The last murder, too, seems to have happened right in the city in which the sacred shrine is located. The Custodes can go there or attempt to contact the various lucumones one by one.

In this latter case, the Custodes do not find any of the characters they are looking for, for they have all left for Volsinii, for the celebrations in honor of Voltumna.

The journey to Volsinii is relatively easy and fast, Clusium and Volsinii being close to one another and connected by the Via Cassia. The Custodes, unless significantly slowed along the road, should reach Volsinii the day of the Ides of August, on the 13th, but the Demiurge is free to add any complication at their discretion to make the journey more interesting.

As soon as they reach the city on the shores of Lacus Volsiniensis, the group notices it is bustling with people and activity. The yearly celebrations of the Etruscan god of vegetation and harvest, Voltumna, begin that very day, and, in a far-away past, they featured the solemn gathering of the representatives of the twelve main Etruscan city-states. These cities had banded into a federation of sorts, and, although politically independent from one another, they felt united by culture and religion, bonds renewed and strengthened every year by gathering at the shrine of divine Voltumna. Back then, the shrine was a sanctum sanctorum for the Etruscan people, the esoteric center of mysterious and powerful magical forces which that people of prophets understood so well.

During these reunions, solemn sacrifices were offered for the twelve *nationes* to attract the benign gaze of the gods or, if necessary, offer reparation sacrifices to placate irate deities. They then drew omens of the future and experimented with new magical rituals to harness the forces of nature. Eventually, important political decisions concerning the entire nations were made.

Now, the celebration is purely symbolic, and has shrunk to a beautiful local tradition for bountiful harvests. It is, however, also a renowned tourist attraction, for the events include entertainment now unusual outside of Etruria, attracting many visitors to Volsinii.

As the Custodes walk the city streets, they spot a colorful crowd headed out of town, as Voltumna is celebrated in his outside shrine, just outside the walls. The people are hurrying, because the festivities of the first day are about to begin.

On the walls of the inns have been painted the program of the celebration: athletic games for the first day, such as races and javelin throwing, as well as typically Etruscan specialties such as boxing, playing the flute, and *triga* (three-horse chariot) racing. The second day is dedicated to theater plays and music; greatly popular are jugglers and acrobats, as well as the famous "Dance of the Armed", performed by unique athlete-dancers. On the third day is held the procession of the statue of the god throughout the city, surrounded by an exultant croud of farmers, traders, and florists, wishing for a bountiful harvest and clement weather. Finally, solemn propitiation rites and prophecies for the coming year are performed at the shrine. All the rites are conducted by the *sacerdos Etruriae*, a priest who lives in the shrine, concluding the celebrations with the sacrifice of a bull and the reading of its entrails. To represent the end of the year, the sacerdos drives a silver nail into one of the doors of the temple.

If the Custodes wish to witness any of the events, they must keep a watchful eye, like everybody else, on the numerous robbers and cutpurses that thrive in the crowd. Unlike others, now the Custodes have on them a good number of precious magical items!

If they head to a taberna or any other locale open to the public, the Custodes can interrogate any of the patrons and innkeepers, from whom they learn the following:

- **There are no more rooms available in the entire town** and the characters must sleep in the cold.
- **General goods prices have increased manifold**, as traders of small Volsinii are profiting off the occasion to fleece the tourists.
- **The shrine where the celebrations of Voltumna are held is not the original** in which the ancient representatives of the Federation performed their rites. That one was near ancient Velzna, the Etruscan Volsinii, ten miles northeast of the present day one. The city the Custodes are visiting now was, in fact, founded by the Romans after they razed the original in 1018 AUC and deported its inhabitants onto the shores of Lacus Volsiniensis. The ancient city is now almost entirely forgotten, and only some local erudites know it as Urbs Vetus (the Old City).

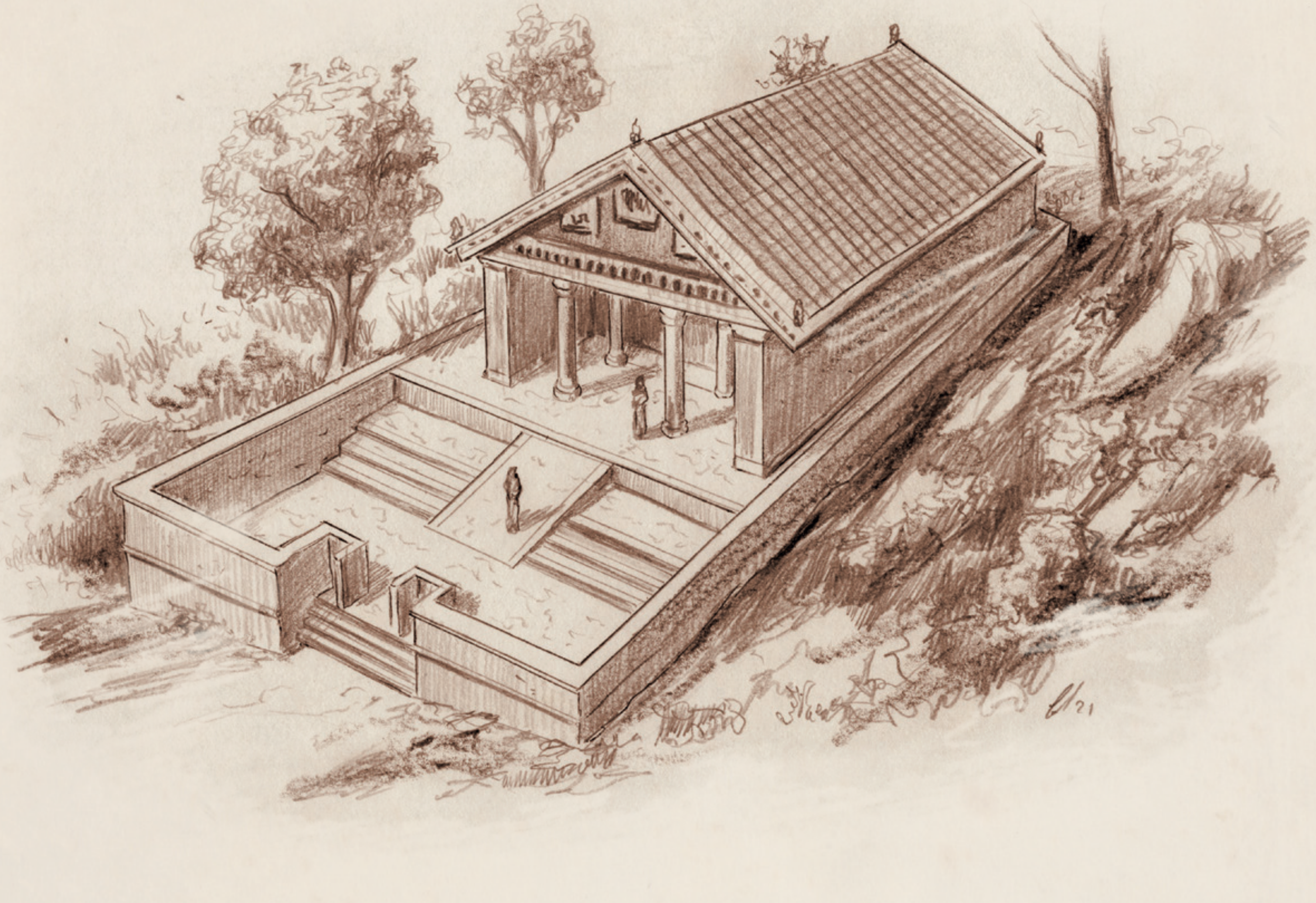
If the Custodes wish to investigate the last murder, they can head to the villa of Quintus Tutilius.

SCENE 12: IN THE VILLA OF QUINTUS TUTILIUS

The villa rustica is outside of town, although calling it a "villa" is an understatement. Rather, it is a latifundium that includes a large farm, numerous orchards, wheat fields, two olive groves, a large vineyard, a flour mill, an olive mill, a small amphora workshop, a beach on the lake, and a farm of highly prized freshwater oyters. At the center of all this, finally, is a large villa with three inner gardens.

Quintus Tutilius was evidently a rich man, though not of noble family, his wealth the fruit of a particular knack for business and the necessary lack of morals to put it to good use. He began trading at a very young age in amulets and talismans for farmers, his wares greatly useful in banishing evil spirits that caused havoc in their fields at night... evil spirits that, if looked at carefully, looked oddly like a well-known local youth! Through years of "creative" business, Quintus Tutilius gathered considerable wealth, now generously financing the research of the Brotherhood, the lucumones always being his guests during the yearly celebration.

The Custodes, in fact, find all the survivors in the great gathering hall, bringing their condolences to the family, Tutilius' aging parents, a nubile aunt, six siblings, his wife, two concubines, four



legitimate children, and many unidentified ones of various ages.

If the Custodes interrogate them, the lucumones provide only vague answers of circumstance, saying they visit every year during the festival of Voltumna, like many other traditionalist Etruscan families. They have always been guests of Tutilius, as his family confirms, because of his spacious house. They say they all know each other because they have studied together or served in the same legions, or are related through marriage, and other simple things. If asked specifically about the tomb of Porsenna, they answer that they know the legends, but each tells a different and absurd version, denying there has ever been a secret organization called the Brotherhood, or with any other name. In short, they are singularly of no help.

Quintus Tutilius was killed at night, in his bedchamber, with neither witnesses nor clues.

SCENE 13: AMONG ANCIENT RUINS

If the Custodes head to ancient Volsinii, spotting its ruins is not easy, nor is the road to arrive there the easiest. The place has been completely forgotten by Roman urban promotion programs, to discourage any reconstruction effort, as well as the values the settlement may have stood for.

After an unwanted encounter (roll once on the Encounters Table for Etruria), the Custodes arrive in the area of the ancient city. If it is the night of the last day of celebrations, go immediately to Scene 15.

If the fateful night is yet to come or is already over, the players do not notice anything unusual there. At that point, they can attempt to find the ruins on a **De Natura** roll (DT 9). If the roll fails, their search is momentarily fruitless, as they lose an hour and the Demiurge rolls on the Encounters Table for Etruria to see what happens. Then, the group can roll again.

When they succeed on the **De Natura** roll, the group finally finds the ruined city on a tall natural rock formation. Once, it was surrounded by walls, now ruined and barely poking through the vegetation. If somebody performs *Speculum* ritual on the ruins, they see most ancient scenes of everyday life dating back to the days of the foundation of Rome, when the Etruscan city was still florid.

Around the city, though outside its walls, must be the ancient Fanum Voltumnae. To find it, once they have located the city, the Custodes must inspect the entire area, gloomily lit by moonlight if the search happens at night. Eventually, somewhere hidden by a steep cliff, the characters notice evidence of an unfortified fence, similar to the one around the modern shrine of Volsinii, hinting at the presence of a temple and open-sky altars. These buildings, too, look destroyed by time and a terrible fire.

If it is not yet the night of the last day of celebrations, with a brief reconnaissance the group recognizes an intact altar, that on more-detailed observation (**De Scientia** roll, DT 6) proves to be of recent make. Examining it under the sun or torch light, the group notices that at its center, where usually is the hole for gathering the blood of the victims, are rust-colored spots. Somebody has used it recently, exactly one year before. Upon closer inspection of the area, the group finds, carefully hidden in the trunk of a hollowed-out tree, a series of sacrificial knives and a bundle of new torches ready for use, bundled in waxed cloth. The knives are sharp and shining, without a spot of rust, there since the year before. By performing a Retrocognition ritual, the group learns of sacrifices similar to the one described in Scene 15. At this point, the Custodes might want to keep the area under observation, waiting for new events. If they are there during the third night of the celebrations, they see Scene 15 unfold in front of them.

If, instead, the Custodes reach ancient Volsinii after the night of the sacrifice, at the center of the sacred fence they find the bodies of three of the seven surviving lucumones, torn apart by demonic claws. They are young Aulus Trebonius and the much older Publius Firmus and Salvus Glaucus. The torches and knives are not in the hollow tree, but on the scarred around. Of the last four survivors, there is no trace; they fled to their cities, where they hide, terrified of the mere sight of the demon. A *Speculum* ritual allows seeing the events of Scene 15, interrupted by the arrival of Tuchulcha and his butchering of the lucumones. By then, the Custodes have lost the chance to placate the demon (the Demiurge can proceed directly to the Conclusion).

SCENE 14: DAY AND NIGHT ON WATCH

If the Custodes choose to keep the villa with the lucumones under observation, they notice nothing unusual. Its inhabitants lead a normal life, and, perhaps due to the loss the family has just suffered, do not take part in the festivities. During the night of the third and last day of the celebrations, however, after a frugal dinner, the surviving lucumones take horses from the villa, headed northeast, with neither a retinue nor servants. One of them carries on his horse a living lamb, its legs tied.

During their journey, the lucumones are dour and silent. Only Petronius Rufus and Aulus Trebonius, the two youngest, ride side by side and chat about the most disparate topics, quickly silenced with a stern rebuke when they raise their voices too much. Some of the of the others are old and sickly, especially Salvus Glaucus, who has frequent fits of coughing. Fortunately, that spring night is rather mild. After a couple of hours, the lucumones reach the ruins of ancient Volsinii, and the events of Scene 15 take place.

SCENE 15: THE DEMON RETURNS

During the night of the last day of celebrations, the seven surviving lucumones make their way to the ruins of the Old City. They leave their horses some distance away from the ruins and take their dark cloaks off, revealing their traditional garb of the ancient priests, now abandoned by Roman ceremonies, which the Custodes can recognize from the paintings in the tomb of Porsenna. They wear simple hide tunics from sacrificed sheep, held by archaic bronze fibulas, and wear tight coifs that elongate into a thin and sharp point.

One of them brings a living lamb, tied and muffled. As soon as he dismounts, he lets the lamb go, the poor beast braying desperately but in vain: for it, there is no freedom.

The lucumones, after a short walk, reach the altar of the Fanum Voltumnae, gather in a circle around it, and begin the expiation sacrifice. One of them places the lamb on the stone, while the others chant an ancient litany in approximative Etruscan, handed down through generations without remembering its literal meaning. If the Custodes wish to speak with the lucumones, they are greatly irritated by the interruption, but have every intention of performing the sacrifice as soon as possible and postpone any discussion.

After only a couple of minutes, however, the sacrifice is interrupted by the sudden and wrathful arrival of Tuchulcha, who descends with claws and beak on the closest lucumones. Preventing the ritual does not stop Tuchulcha from arriving, for he comes of his own volition to perform his sacred and grim duty, appearing anyway for his massacre. In the ensuing brawl, he kills one Lucumon every other combat tempus, as the others flee in terror. After mauling three, the demon lets the survivors reach their horses and escape.

Whether the Custodes attack the demon with conventional weapons or any of the supernatural means they have at their disposal, including calling lightning if they have translated the Tablet of Pursna, Tuchulcha cannot be killed. However, if his Hit Points are reduced to 0, he disappears for a week. Reading in front of him the formula found in the Sacred Fence of Tarquinia has the same effect, although only in the original Etruscan.

CONCLUSION

The banishment of Tuchulcha gives the lucumones time to resume and terminate their rite. After than, the Custodes can interrogate them. They do not reveal the implications of the conspiracy entirely, but turn themselves in as those solely responsible, and any further investigation is not a task for the Custodes anymore. Instead, the functionaries of the Praefectus Urbi take into custody the conspirators to bring them to Rome as soon as possible, where they will be “more thoroughly” interrogated. The Custodes have freed the region from the demonic nightmare, stopped a scheme against the Empire, and unearthed important magical items, especially the powerful ritual to summon lightning bolts. Remembering the words of the Lasa, the Custodes should press the lucumones to sacrifice all the ancient Etruscan heirlooms in their possession over the course of a new ritual, a request the surviving lucumones are more than happy to oblige. At the end of the ritual appears Achununa, who announces the definitive return of Tuchulcha to the Underworld to his master Charun, now satisfied.

If, for any ill-fated reason, the Custodes do not placate the demon, he keeps hunting the survivors one by one, appearing to them when least expected and killing them within two days of each other. The Custodes may face the demon again, but to do so they must follow the lucumones day and night, most likely against their will, for they keep to their secret activities. However it goes, they are shamefully assigned to another case with the death of the last Lucumon.

If the Custodes visited the tomb of Porsenna without doing the bidding of Achununa, they are Tuchulcha’s last victims before his return to the Underworld.

To award additional experience points, apply the following:

- The Custodes recovered all the objects from the tomb of Porsenna: +1 Experience Point
- The Custodes saved the last seven lucumones from the fury of Tuchulcha: +1 Experience Point
- The Custodes have gathered information on the Brotherhood of the Twelve Peoples: +1 Experience Point
- The Custodes have appeased the anger of Charun and Tuchulcha: +1 Experience Point

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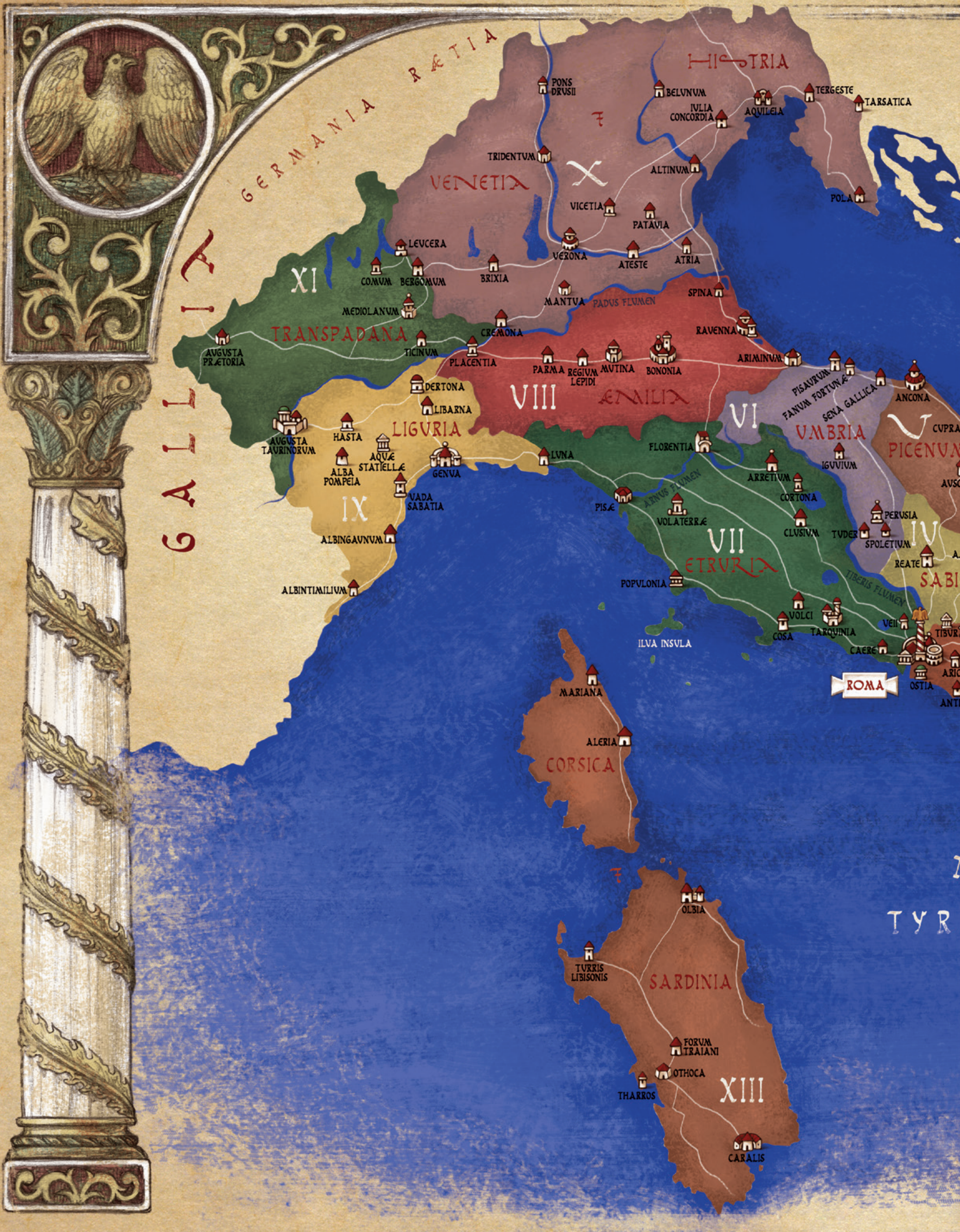
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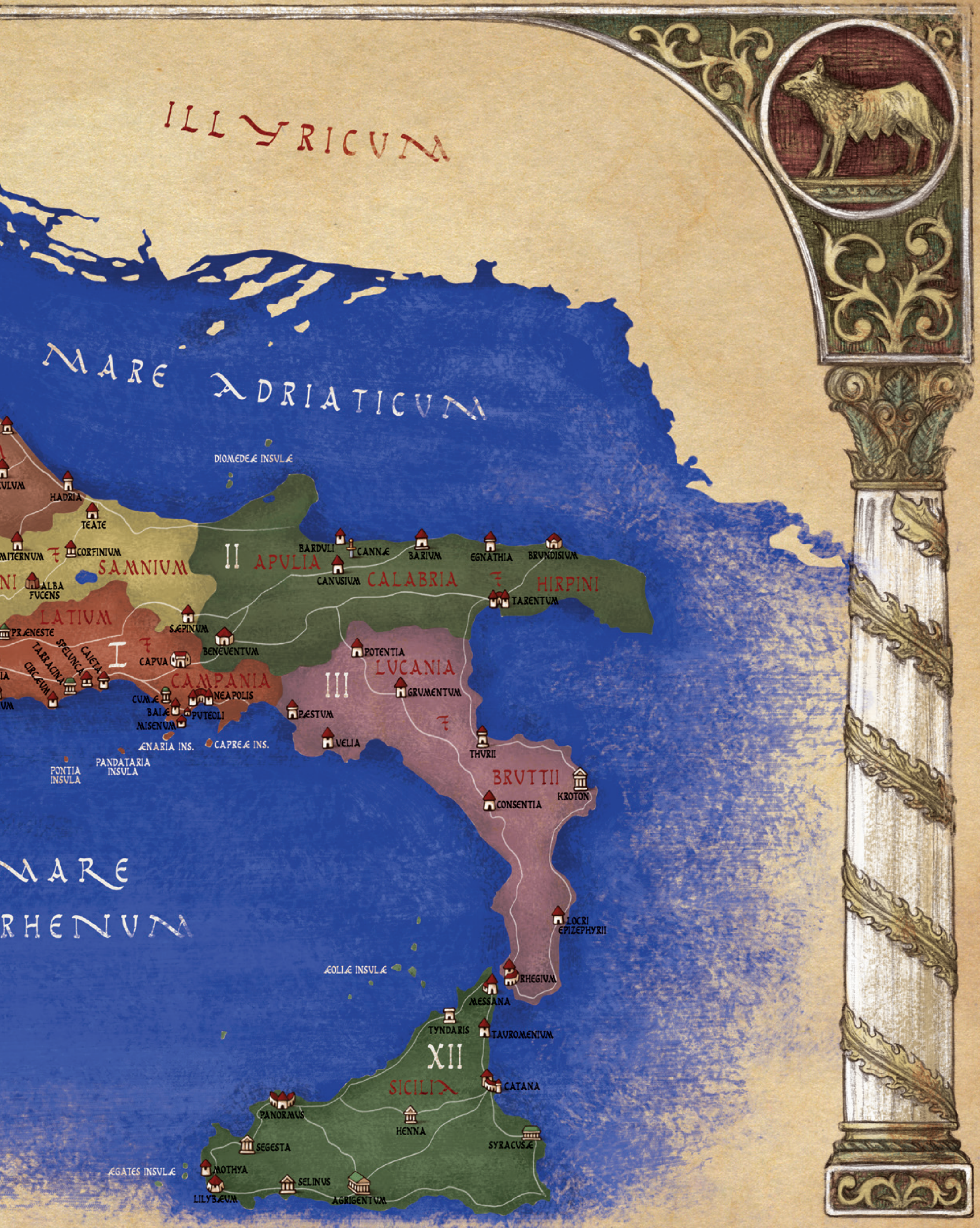
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